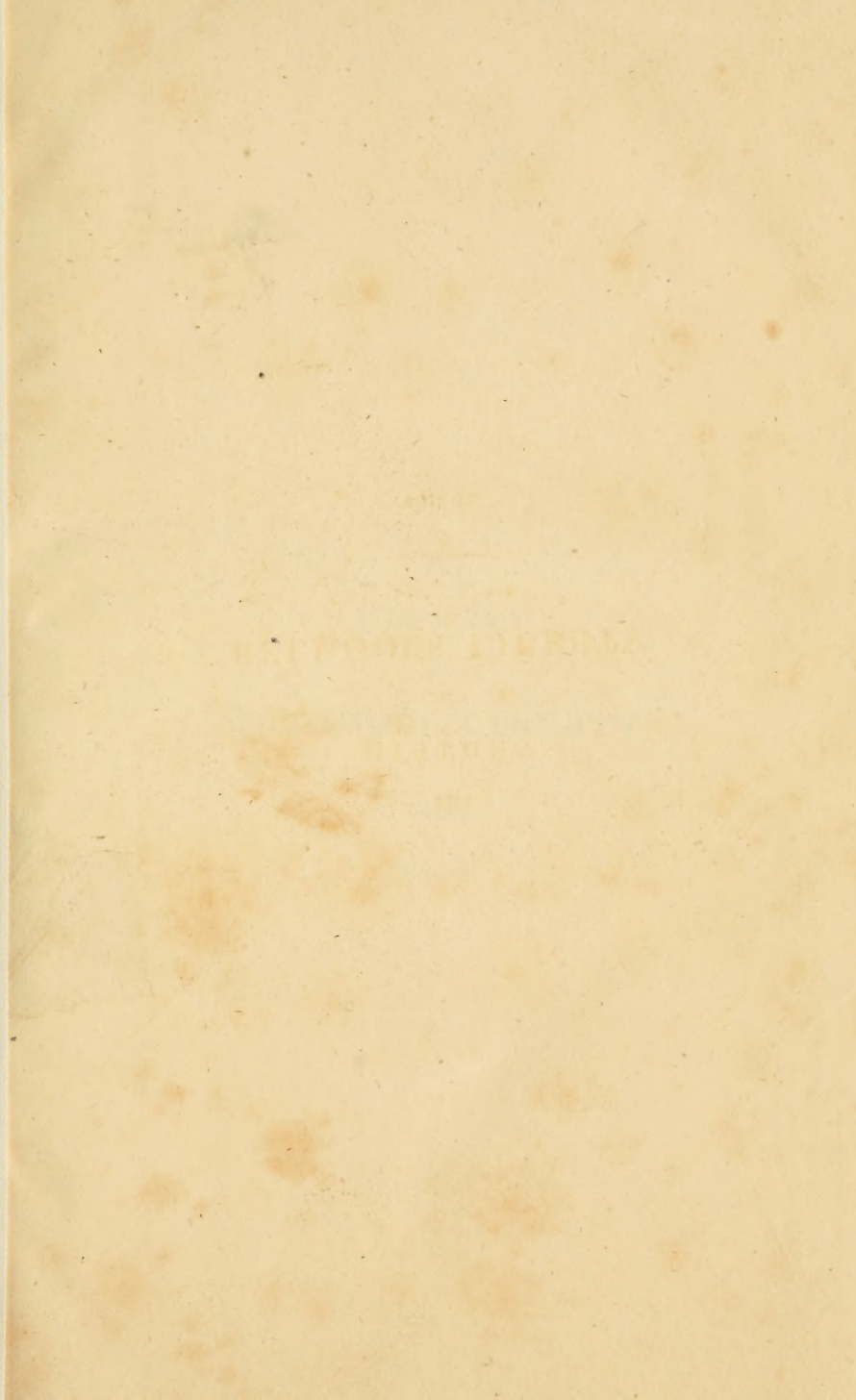


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HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY
FROM THE FIRST PROPAGATION OF
CHRISTIANITY IN BRITAIN





THE
HISTORY
OF
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.

VOL. II.

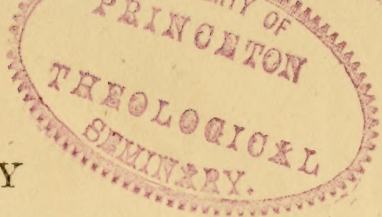
THE HISTORY OF THE

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Religious Liberty

FROM THE
FIRST PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN BRITAIN,
TO
THE DEATH OF GEORGE III.,
INCLUDING
ITS SUCCESSIVE STATE, BENEFICIAL INFLUENCE, AND
POWERFUL INTERRUPTIONS.

By BENJAMIN BROOK.

In two Volumes.

VOL. II.

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Religious Liberty

The first principle of religious liberty is that every man has a right to worship God in his own way, without any interference from the government. This principle is the foundation of all religious freedom. It is the right of every man to believe what he pleases, to worship God as he thinks proper, and to express his opinions on religious matters without fear of persecution or punishment. This right is not limited by the majority, nor by the state, nor by any other power. It is a right which belongs to every man by the laws of God and of nature.

The second principle of religious liberty is that the government has no right to interfere with the religious beliefs or practices of any man. The government is established for the purpose of securing the rights of the people, and it has no right to interfere with the rights of the people in matters of religion. The government is not to establish any religion, nor to give any preference to one religion over another. It is to be neutral in matters of religion, and to protect the rights of all religions equally.

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THEOLOGICAL
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HISTORY

OF

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.

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### CHAPTER I.

THE REIGN OF KING CHARLES II.

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SECTION I.

Attempts to Unite all Parties followed by Severe Intolerance.

IN the former volume, the powerful interruptions and tardy progress of religious freedom are traced through the various successive stages from the first propagation of Christianity down to the restoration, by adverting to the numerous penal statutes originating in an assumed authority over conscience, and to the multiplied struggles and conflicts for greater purity and moderation in the church of God. Through this long period, the reader must have observed almost innumerable events, which, though painful and afflictive to the nation, were overruled, by the providence of God, for the accomplishment of the most important purposes. By this protracted conflict between ecclesiastical despotism, and the rights of conscience, light and truth were diffused, superstition and usurpation detected, and the minds of men at length restored, in a measure, to the possession of those rights and benefits which were given them by their Creator, and which will be held inviolably sacred by every free government.

The restoration of king CHARLES II., son of Charles I., was an event not less remarkable than any of the foregoing, and followed by consequences not less important to the churches of Jesus Christ. This great event, described at large by historians, produced another complete change in the state of religious freedom, as well as in the principles and proceedings of civil government. This great national revolution, as might have been anticipated, was opposed or promoted by different parties as their respective interests were likely to be affected by it; many rejoiced with trembling, while others flattered themselves in expectation of royal favour and encouragement in the profession of religion.

The persons in power having debated the question, "Whether they should call home the king upon treaty and covenant, or entirely confide in him?" it was concluded to trust him without condition or limitation. His majesty had already sent his famous declaration from Breda, addressed to the parliament, making large promises of liberty to all classes of peaceable Christians. In this document he declared, that "because the passion and uncharitableness of the times have produced several opinions in religion, by which men are engaged in parties and animosities against each other; which, when they shall hereafter unite in a freedom of conversation, will be composed, or better understood; *We do declare a liberty to tender consciences*; and that *no man shall be disquieted, or called in question, for differences of opinion in matters of religion*, which do not disturb the peace of the kingdom; and that we shall be ready to consent to such an *act of parliament*, as upon mature consideration shall be offered unto us, for the *full granting that indulgence*."*

This declaration contained the most honourable proposal and promise to secure to every worthy subject, by constitutional enactment, the birthright of rational man, against the encroachment of intolerance and arbitrary power. If king Charles had directed all his proceedings in the re-organization of the English church, in perfect conformity to this sacred principle, almost innumerable instances of oppression and persecution would have been prevented, while the justice and po-

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 616.

liey of his government would have excited the admiration of posterity. The generous sentiments contained in this royal document made a favourable impression upon the minds of all persons of liberal principles, who gave full credit to the sincerity of his majesty's intentions.

The presbyterians took a distinguished part in promoting the restoration ;* and the king being voted home, a deputation was appointed by the parliament and the city of London to attend him. On the list of appointment were eight or ten presbyterian divines ; who, upon their arrival at the Hague, signified, in the name of themselves and their brethren, their duty and affection to his majesty ; and “ they thanked God for his majesty's constancy in the protestant religion, and declared themselves no enemies to moderate episcopacy. They desired that those things might not be pressed upon them in God's worship, which, in the judgment of those who used them, were owned to be indifferent, while others refused them as altogether unlawful.” The king received them kindly, and said he had heard of their good behaviour ; that he had no intention to impose hard conditions, or to embarrass their consciences ; that he had referred the settlement of all religious differences, to the wisdom of the parliament ; and that the two houses were the best judges what indulgence and toleration was necessary for the repose of the kingdom.

These divines, having several interviews with the king, took the liberty of suggesting, that the book of Common-prayer had for a long time been discontinued in England ; and that many of the people had never once heard it : therefore they entreated his majesty not to revive the use of it. Their request was unreasonable, grossly absurd, and directly opposed to the right of private judgment. The king, and all his subjects, who might be so disposed, had, unquestionably, an equal right to use the Common-prayer in divine worship, as the presbyterians had to use any other prayers. Spiritual usurpation does not consist in the *use*, but in the *imposition* of forms of prayer in the worship of God ; while religious freedom secures invariably to all, an equal share of liberty to use the prayers of their own choice. His majesty, therefore,

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 607.—Stuarts, vol. ii. p. 472, 486.

on this occasion discovered greater liberality than these learned divines, when he replied with some resentment, "that since he granted them their liberty, he should by no means resign his own; that he had always used that form of service; that he thought it the best in the world; and that when he came to England, he would not make any strict inquiry how they officiated in other churches; but that he was resolved not to suffer any other public devotions in his own chapel." When the presbyterian divines importuned the king, "that the use of the surplice might be discontinued by his chaplains, he told them plainly, "he would not be restrained, when others had so much indulgence."* These excellent sentiments reflect great honour upon the discrimination and liberality of king Charles, and they justly recognise the rights and claims of mankind, to worship God without the least human molestation.

Upon his majesty's arrival on May 29, 1660, as he passed through the city towards Westminster, the London ministers united in the public acclamations; and, by the hands of old Mr. Jackson, they presented him with a richly adorned Bible; which he received, saying, "It shall be the rule of my government and life." From this time there was so much emulation and impatience, in both houses of parliament, in the city, and in the country, who should make the most lively expressions of their duty and their joy, that lord Clarendon said, a man could not but wonder where those people now lived who had done so much mischief, and kept the king so many years from enjoying the comfort and support of such excellent subjects. It ought to be remembered, as my author adds, that the restoration of the king without treaty, or any security of the liberties of the nation, was the foundation of all the misfortunes that followed.†

The king being placed on the throne of his ancestors, and the church of England resuming her former magnificence, the episcopalians were at once raised to the height of their wishes. The presbyterians flattered themselves, that their services for the king would at least procure them entire liberty of conscience, with the free exercise of their religion. The independents and baptists could not, indeed, hope to be incorpo-

* Collier, vol. ii. p. 870, 871.

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 594.

rated with the hierarchy, but expected an entire impunity, agreeably to the declaration from Breda. At the same time, some of the moderate episcopalians proposed a friendly union with the presbyterians; but the more politic of them knew that all the ancient power, honour, and revenues would be restored and exclusively shared among churchmen. Ten presbyterian divines were made the king's chaplains; therefore the party had some hopes of favour, and their access to his majesty was rendered more easy. They were particularly concerned to obtain a friendly union with their episcopal brethren; for which purpose they presented their address to the king; declaring, that they recommended the formation of a Christian union through the kingdom; and that if his majesty would be pleased to contribute his assistance, no time, they conceived, could be more promising than the present juncture. They entreated that the terms of this union might include nothing but things necessary; that the true exercise of church discipline might be allowed; and that those ministers who were most serviceable to this branch of the sacred function might not be laid aside, and unworthy, unqualified men forced upon the people.*

The king signified how much he was pleased with their conciliating temper, and that he was resolved to do his part towards promoting the desired object. He would leave no proper methods unattempted, with a view to procure harmony among his subjects, and to draw persons of different persuasions to a good understanding. He, therefore, published his royal declaration "to all his loving subjects," concerning ecclesiastical matters, expressing his sentiments as follows:

"In our letter to the speaker of the house of commons from Breda, we declared how much we desired the advancement and propagation of the protestant religion: that neither the unkindness of those of the same faith towards us, nor the civilities and obligations from those of the contrary profession, could in the least degree startle us, or make us swerve from it; and that nothing can be proposed to manifest our zeal and affection for it, to which we will not readily consent. We then said, that we hoped in due time ourselves to propose something

* Collier, vol. ii. p. 871.

for the propagation of it, that would satisfy the world that we have always made it both our care and our study, and have sufficiently observed what is most likely to injure it.

“ When we were in Holland, we were attended by many grave and learned ministers from hence, who were looked upon as the most able and principal assertors of the presbyterian opinions, with whom we had as much conference as the multitude of affairs, which were upon us, would permit : and to our great satisfaction and comfort, we have found them persons full of affection to us, of zeal for the peace of the church and state ; and neither enemies (as they have been given out to be) of episcopacy or liturgy ; but they modestly desire such alterations as, without shaking foundations, might best allay the present distempers, which the indisposition of the times, and the tenderness of some men’s consciences, had contracted. For the better doing whereof, we intended upon our first arrival in this kingdom to call a synod of divines, as the most proper expedient to provide a proper remedy for all those differences and dissatisfactions, which had arisen or should arise in matters of religion : and in the mean time, we published in our declaration from Breda, ‘ A liberty to tender consciences, and that no man should be disquieted or called in question for difference of opinion in matters of religion, which does not disturb the peace of the kingdom ; and that we shall be ready to consent to such an act of parliament, as shall upon mature consideration be offered to us, for the full grant of that indulgence.’

“ We cannot but observe, that those pious and learned men with whom we have conferred upon this argument, and who are most solicitous for indulgence of this kind, are earnest for the same, out of compassion to the weakness and tenderness of the consciences of their brethren ; not that they, who are very zealous for order and decency, do in their judgments believe the practice of those particular ceremonies which they except against to be in themselves unlawful ; and it cannot be doubted, that as the universal church cannot introduce one ceremony into the worship of God, that is contrary to God’s word expressed in Scripture ; so every national church, with the approbation and consent of the sovereign power, may and hath always introduced such particular ceremonies, as at that junct-

ture of time are thought most proper to edification, and the improvement of piety and devotion in the people; though the necessary practice thereof cannot be deduced from Scripture, and that which before was and in itself is indifferent, ceases to be indifferent after it is once established by law. Therefore our present consideration and work is, to gratify the private consciences of those that are grieved with the use of certain ceremonies, by indulging and dispensing with their omission of those ceremonies; not utterly to abolish any which are established by law, which would be unjust, and of ill example, and it would be to impose upon the consciences of some whom we believe much superior in number and quality, for the satisfaction of the consciences of others. As it would not be reasonable to expect, that we should ourselves decline, or enjoin others to decline, to receive the blessed sacrament upon our knees, which in our consciences is the most humble, most devout, and most agreeable posture for that holy duty, because some other men upon reasons best known to themselves, choose rather to do it sitting or standing: We shall leave all decisions and determinations of this kind, if they shall be thought necessary for a perfect unity and uniformity throughout the nation, to the advice of a national synod, which after a little time shall be duly called, and a mutual conversation between persons of different persuasions shall have mollified those distempers, abated those sharpnesses, and extinguished those jealousies, which make men unfit for those consultations; and, upon such advice, we shall use our best endeavour that such laws may be established as will best provide for the peace of the church and state.

“ In a word, we do again renew what we have formerly said in our declaration from Breda, for the liberty of tender consciences, that no man shall be disquieted or called in question for difference of opinion in matters of religion, which do not disturb the peace of the kingdom; and if any have been disturbed in that kind since our arrival, it hath not proceeded from any direction of ours.”

Thus, we see that the liberty to tender consciences, published in the declaration from Breda, was granted, as a kind of interim, till a proper remedy for existing differences and dissatisfactions in matters of religion, could be effectually pro-

vided. The presbyterians thus understood the declaration from Breda, and, in consequence of thus understanding it, were encouraged to propose their terms of concord; and, as appears from the king's own testimony, if they had not so understood it, they would not have understood it according to his majesty's intentions.*

The king having openly stated his views in the foregoing document, proceeds to make a number of important concessions, and to suggest various alterations, for the greater satisfaction of scrupulous consciences. And, lest it should be supposed that these concessions and alterations were different from the royal promise already given, his majesty puts the matter out of all dispute, in the following words:—"To conclude, and in this place to explain what we mentioned before, and said in our letter to the house of commons from Breda, that we hoped in due time ourselves to propose somewhat for the propagation of the protestant religion;—we do conjure all our loving subjects to acquiesce in, and submit to, this our declaration concerning those differences, which have so much disquieted the nation at home, and given such offence to the protestant churches abroad."†

A learned prelate, in commendation of this declaration, says, it discovers a spirit of truth and wisdom and charity above any other public profession hitherto made in matters of religion. It shows the admirable temper and prudence of the king and his council at this critical juncture. It proves the charity and moderation of the suffering bishops in concluding such concessions to be just and reasonable for peace and unity; and it shows a disposition in the principal persons of the other party, to have accepted of the terms of union consistent with episcopacy. It condemns the unhappy ferments which soon after followed for want of coming to this temper; and it stands as a pattern to posterity, whenever they may be disposed to restore the discipline and heal the breaches of the church. He then adds, that a very learned conformist gave this character of it:—"If ever a divine sentence was in the mouth of any king, and his mouth erred not in judgment, I verily believe it was thus with our present majesty, when he composed that

* Blackburne's Works, vol. vi. p. 122. † Life of Baxter, part ii. p. 259—264.

admirable declaration ; which, next to holy Scripture, I adore, and think that the united judgment of the whole nation cannot frame a better, or a more unexceptionable expedient for a firm and lasting concord of distracted churches.”*

We shall not inquire how far this is the language of panegyric. His majesty submitted his declaration to the inspection of the presbyterian ministers, allowing them to suggest the alterations which they wished to be adopted in the ecclesiastical establishment now about to be re-erected ; but, notwithstanding these repeated pledges and assurances from the prince, many students were already ejected from the universities, and many faithful ministers removed from their beloved flocks, only for want of conformity to the church now rising from the dead. This appears from a petition of the presbyterian ministers, first submitted to the revisal of the earl of Manchester, the earl of Anglesey, and lord Hollis, and then presented to the king ; in which they said—“ So great was the comfort created in our minds by your majesty’s repeated resolution to become the effectual moderator of our differences, and yourself to bring us together by procuring such mutual condescensions as are necessary, and also by your gracious acceptance of our proposals, which your majesty heard and received, not only without blame, but with acknowledgment of their moderation, and such as would promote a reconciliation between the differing parties.”

In this petition, after expressing their grief and sympathy for their suffering brethren and their bereaved flocks, they said—“ As our desires and designs are not for any worldly dignities or advantages to ourselves, so have we not presumed to intermeddle with any civil interest of your majesty, or any of your officers ; nor in the matters of mere convenience to cast our reason into the balance against your majesty’s prudence ; but merely to speak for the laws, and worship, and servants of the Lord, and for the peace of our consciences, and the safety of our own and our brethren’s souls. It lifts us up with joy to think what happy consequences will ensue, if your majesty shall entertain these healing notions : How happily will our differences be reconciled, and the exasperated minds

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 229.

of men composed: How temptations to contention and uncharitableness will be removed: How comfortably your majesty will reign in the dearest affections of your subjects: How firmly they will adhere to your interest as their own: How cheerfully and zealously the united parts and interests of the nation will conspire to serve you: What a strength and honour a righteous magistracy, a learned, holy, loyal ministry, and a faithful, praying people will be to your throne: And how it will be your glory to be the king of the most religious nation in the world, that hath no considerable parties, but what are centred under Christ in you. What a comfort it will be for the bishops and pastors of the church, to be honoured and loved by all the religious of their flocks; to see the success of their labours and the beauty of the church promoted by our common concord, and brethren to assemble and dwell together in unity: serving one God, according to one rule, with one heart and mouth.”*

The presbyterian ministers amounting to a considerable number in and about London, admiring the liberality of the king’s declaration, and the renewal of his royal promise of religious freedom, presented the following “humble and grateful acknowledgment” to his majesty, for his “gracious concessions:”

“May it please your majesty—The liberty of our consciences, and the free exercise of our ministry in the work of our great Lord and Master, for the conversion of souls, ought to be, and are, more dear to us than all the profits and preferments in the world; therefore your majesty’s tenderness, manifested in these high concernments, doth wonderfully affect us, and raise our hearts to a high pitch of gratitude. We cannot but adore divine goodness for your majesty’s steadfast adherence to the protestant religion, notwithstanding all temptations and provocations to the contrary, and your professed zeal for the advancement and propagation thereof, declaring that nothing can be proposed to manifest your zeal and affection for it, to which you will not readily consent.

“Your majesty has graciously declared, that your resolution is, and shall be, to promote the power of godliness, to

encourage the exercises of religion, both public and private, to take care that the Lord's day be applied to holy exercises, without unnecessary diversions ; and that insufficient, negligent, and scandalous ministers be not permitted in the church. Your majesty hath granted that no bishop shall ordain or exercise any part of jurisdiction which appertains to the censures of the church, without the advice and assistance of the presbyters, and neither do, nor impose any thing, but according to the known laws of the land. You have excluded chancellors, commissioners, and officials from acts of jurisdiction ; happily restored the power of the pastors in their several congregations ; and granted a liberty to all the ministers to assemble monthly, for the exercise of the pastoral persuasive power, to the promoting of knowledge and godliness in their flocks. Your majesty hath graciously promised a review and effectual reformation of the liturgy, with additional forms to be used by choice : and in the meantime, that none shall be punished or troubled for not using it. Your majesty hath graciously freed us from subscription required by the canon, and the oath of canonical obedience ; and granted us to receive ordination, institution, and induction, and to exercise our function, and enjoy the profit of our livings, without the same. Your majesty hath gratified the consciences of many, who are grieved with the use of certain ceremonies, by indulging and dispensing with them ; as kneeling at the sacrament, the cross in baptism, bowing at the name of Jesus, and wearing the surplice.

“ All this your majesty's indulgence and tender compassion (which with delight we have taken the boldness thus to commemorate) we receive with all humility and thankfulness ; and, as the best expression thereof, shall never cease to pray for your majesty's long and prosperous reign ; and study how, in our several stations, we may be most instrumental in your majesty's service. And that we may not be defective in ingenuity, we crave leave to profess that though all things in this frame of government be not exactly suited to our judgment ; yet your majesty's moderation hath so great an influence upon us, that we shall, to our utmost, endeavour the healing of the breaches, and promote the peace and union of the church.

“ There are some other things that have been propounded by our reverend brethren, which, upon our knees, with all

humble importunity, we could beg of your majesty, especially that re-ordination, and the surplice in colleges, may not be imposed; and we cannot lay aside our hopes, but that God, who hath thus far drawn your majesty's bowels and mercy, will further incline your majesty's heart also to gratify in these our humble desires. That we be not further burdensome, we humbly beg leave to thank your majesty for the liberty and respect vouchsafed to our reverend brethren, in this weighty affair of accommodation. The God of heaven bless your majesty, and all the royal family: Your majesty's most loyal subjects."*

This address was presented to the king at Whitehall, by a deputation of the ministers, to whom his majesty returned a "very gracious answer." With a view to secure the desired union, the king, according to his royal pledges, appointed a number of dignitaries and presbyterian ministers to hold a conference at the Savoy, to review the Book of Common-prayer, comparing it with the purest ancient liturgies; and to take into their serious and grave considerations the several directions, rules and forms of prayer, and things contained in the said Book of Common-prayer, and to advise and consult upon them, and the several objections and exceptions which might be raised against them: and if occasion offered, to make such reasonable and necessary alterations, corrections, and amendments, as should be agreed upon to be needful or expedient for giving satisfaction to tender consciences, and for the restoring of peace and unity in the churches under his majesty's direction and government.†

The learned commissioners were required to finish their consultations within the fixed period of four months, and to present all their alterations and amendments to the approbation of the king. Upon their first assembling, bishop Sheldon observed that those on the part of the church had not desired the conference, being perfectly satisfied with the present ecclesiastical establishment; therefore they had nothing to offer: but it belonged to the other party, who moved for alterations, to offer their exceptions to the existing laws, with the alterations they proposed. He moreover signified, that they must

* Life of Baxter, part ii. p. 284, 285.

† Ibid. 304.

lay all they had to offer before them *at once*, that the extent of their demands might appear. The presbyterians moved that archbishop Usher's reduction of episcopacy might be adopted as the foundation, and suggested a great number of alterations and amendments, which are still on record.* Sheldon clearly saw, says Burnet, what would be the effect of requiring them to make all their proposed alterations at once; and the number of them raised so great an outcry against them, that the people could never be satisfied. The presbyterians maintained that it was injustice, as well as hostility to the laws of Christ, to make peremptory laws concerning things indifferent. This the other party denied, and insisted on the observance of the ecclesiastical laws already in force, against which they would admit of no exception, unless it could be proved to their satisfaction that those laws were sinful. They charged the others with the sin of *schism*, for their objections brought against the church; and they said, there was no reason for gratifying such persons in any thing: granting one request would lead to many more! All authority both in church and state, they said, justified the lawfulness of imposing things indifferent, since they seemed to be the only proper things about which human authority could interpose. This was certainly a very singular method of reasoning. It, nevertheless, answered the purpose of the dominant party, and served to expose the others as opposers of all good order, and enemies to the church. The conference, therefore, was conducted with some degree of sharpness, and dissolved without coming to any agreement.†

The general reasons assigned by the ministers for the improvements they proposed, were, that the doubts and scruples of tender consciences still continued, or rather increased. They also humbly conceived it to be a work worthy of those wonders of salvation, which God had wrought for his majesty now on the throne, and for the whole kingdom, and exceedingly becoming the ministers of the Gospel of peace, with all holy moderation and tenderness, to seek the removal of every thing out of the worship of God, which might justly offend or grieve the spirits of sober and pious people. The things

* Life of Baxter, part ii. p. 308—365.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 179—182.

themselves that were desired to be removed, not being of the foundations of religion, nor the essentials of public worship, nor the removal of them any way tending to the prejudice of the church or state ; therefore the continuance and rigorous imposition of them, could not be considered a circumstance of weight as the laying aside of so many pious and able ministers ; not to mention the inconceivable grief that would arise to multitudes of his majesty's loyal and peaceable subjects, who, upon all occasions, were ready to serve him with their prayers, estates, and lives. For the preventing of these evils, they humbly desired that the particulars which they enumerated might be taken into serious and tender consideration.*

The dissolution of the Savoy conference put an end to all prospect of accommodation and friendly union. It was easy to see, says archdeacon Blackburne, on which side lay the sophistry and hypocrisy.† The discussions, instead of promoting reconciliation and greater agreement, only produced disaffection and wider discord of opinion ; and even during this unpropitious conference, great numbers of pious and peaceable persons were disturbed in the public worship of God, and dragged to prison. Of this number were many of the baptists in various parts of the country ; and from their dreary prisons, they sent their petitions to the king. Those in Lincolnshire addressed his majesty in these words :

“ From our assemblies, O king ! we have been discharged by some in magisterial capacity in these parts ; although, we bless God, none hath ever found us with multitude or with tumult : But being taught of God to obey him in things by him commanded, rather than man, when commanding things contrary ; we therefore durst not receive that discharge. Wherefore some of us have been silenced from making mention of the name of the Lord, as formerly, by being entangled in bonds, professedly imposed upon us for this good behaviour : to which in our innocency we readily yielded ; being bound in conscience to our good behaviour, we feared not to be bound thereto by law. But such is the sad estate of this generation, that ‘ they call good evil, and evil good ;’ with sorrow we speak it, taking their advantage against us in our serving the

* Life of Baxter, part ii. p. 321

† Blackburne's Works, vol. vi. p. 251.

Lord. On account of these obligations, O king! they call us peace-breakers; when, in the sincerity of our hearts, and innocence of our souls, we peaceably meet to worship our God in his fear. Since we were thus entangled, O king! we have been much abused as we passed the streets, and as we sat in our houses; being threatened to be hanged, if only heard praying in our families, and often disturbed in waiting upon God. We have been stoned when going to our meetings; the windows have been struck down with stones; yea, we have been taken as evil-doers, and imprisoned, when peaceably met together to worship the Most High, in the use of his most precious ordinances. We have, O king! laid these things before those in authority, but can have no redress from them; but the rage of our adversaries hath been augmented by hearing us abused by those in open court, who sat on the bench of justice, under the odious terms of knavish, juggling, impudent, and fanatic fellows! And, as if all this was too little, they have very lately indicted many of us at the sessions, and intend, as we are informed, to impose on us the penalty of *twenty pounds* per month, for not coming to hear such men as they provide for us, of whose principles and practices we could give a sad and doleful, yet most true relation."

His majesty had no share in these disgraceful proceedings; but having graciously received the messengers who presented the petition, he replied—"That it was not his mind that any of his good subjects who lived peaceably, should suffer any trouble on account of their religion, as he had made known the same in several declarations." He also promised that none of his subjects should be molested about matters of conscience, and gave immediate orders for the relief of the prisoners.*

The prisoners in Maidstone, who were persecuted for their allegiance to Christ, at the same time presented the following humble petition to the king:

"May it please your majesty.—For as much as by authority derived from yourself, several of us your subjects, inhabitants, in the county of Kent, are now imprisoned; it therefore much concerns thee, O king! to hear what account we give of our present distressed condition. Thou hast already

* Crosby, vol. ii. p. 20—22.

seen our confession of faith, wherein our peaceable resolutions were declared. We have not violated any part thereof, that should cause that liberty promised from Breda to be withdrawn. As to our principles that most particularly relate to magistrates and government, we have with all clearness laid them before thee, humbly beseeching they may be presently read, and what we say weighed in the balance of the sanctuary; and then judge how worthy we are either of bonds or imprisonment. This we the more earnestly desire, because not only our own lives are in danger, but also an irresistible destruction cometh on our wives and little ones, by that violence which is now exercised upon us. Disdain not our plainness of speaking, seeing the great God accepts the same. That all thy proceedings, O king! both towards us and all men, may be pleasing to the eternal God, in whose hands is all our breath, who will ere long judge both quick and dead according to their works, is the prayers of thy faithful subjects and servants, the prisoners in the gaol of Maidstone, for the testimony of a good conscience.”*

Subjoined to this petition was their open acknowledgment of his majesty's dignity and authority in all *civil* causes, over all manner of persons, ecclesiastical as well as civil, within his dominions; after which they declared, that some of them had their houses broken open in the dead of the night, without producing any legal authority; their goods and cattle taken away, which were still detained; some from their dwellings, and others from their peaceable meetings, were committed to prison. They, therefore, humbly beseeched the king, that liberty might be given them to worship God; and that bowels of compassion might be so exercised towards them as to procure for them speedy relief, in a way that appeared most agreeable to the will of God.

The baptists at this juncture published an address to the king, parliament, and people, against the magistrate's impositions on conscience, and for a free toleration, containing the following important sentiments:

“If magistrates, *as such*, have this authority, then all magistrates in all nations have the same power. So that if we

* Crosby, vol. ii. p. 22.

lived in Turkey we must receive the Alcoran, and the worship of Mahomet ; if in Spain, we must be papists ; but if in England, we must sometimes be papists, as in the days of Henry VIII., protestants in those of Edward VI., papists again in those of queen Mary, and protestants again in the reign of queen Elizabeth ; and so for ever, as authority changes religion, we must change too ; but, God forbid, for nothing can be more absurd.

“ In the days of the Gospel, the Lord Jesus is the great Prophet, which as Moses said, ‘ is to be heard in all things ;’ and, as he himself testifies, ‘ hath all power in heaven and on earth.’ If then magistrates have power to impose any thing by outward force on the conscience, it must be committed to them by Jesus Christ, and written in the New Testament ; or else how doth it appear ? Let no one think of men above that which is written. But the whole stream of the New Testament runs clear in another channel, and there is no colour for any such imposition. It is evident the apostles themselves, who gave those commands about obedience to magistrates, refused obedience to them, when they were commanded to forbear in that which they judged to be a part of the worship of God ; and said : ‘ Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.’

“ All the Scriptures of the New Testament, which enjoin obedience to magistrates, were written when the Romans had the empire of the world ; whose emperors were heathenish idolators, for the first three hundred years, until the days of Constantine. It, therefore, cannot be supposed, that any of those texts of Scripture, which require obedience to magistrates, intend obedience in *matters of faith* : for then the Christians who lived under those emperors must needs have denied Christ, and have worshipped the Roman gods, as some of the emperors commanded. If magistrates, as such, have power from God, according to the Gospel, to command in spiritual matters, and to punish those who refuse obedience ; then must Christians be obedient, ‘ not only for wrath, but also for conscience’ sake :’ otherwise they would resist the ordinance of God. But no magistrate hath power to compel in spiritual matters ; for the saints are to endure sufferings and persecu-

tions rather than obey, which was abundantly foretold, rewarded, and justified by our Lord.

“ That the power to judge and determine in spiritual matters, is not in the magistrate, as such, was well understood by Gallio, the Roman deputy, when the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat, saying—‘ This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.’ Which hath almost ever since been the great outcry of all sorts of *national clergy*, who have had the magistrates on their side, against all others who have differed from them ; but Gallio said—‘ If it were a matter of wrong, or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you : but if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it : for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drove them from the judgment-seat.’ If magistrates would be persuaded to follow this worthy example, by judging and punishing *civil* injuries, and leaving *spiritual differences* to be judged and punished by Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel ; then would they find themselves and their governments free from many inconveniences in which they are now involved, about deciding religious controversies by external power and force.

“ No magistrate, although a *Christian*, has power to be lord over another’s faith, or, by outward force, to impose any thing in the worship of God. This is very clear, because the Lord Jesus would never, by any outward force, compel men to receive him or his doctrine. For when his disciples, supposing they must use violence as under the law, would have commanded fire to descend from heaven, to consume those who would not receive him, he turned and rebuked them, saying—‘ Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of ; for the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.’ That it is not the intent of the Lord Jesus, that judgment should be executed on those who reject his words, by punishing them in their bodies or estates, most remarkably appears from his own words, saying—‘ If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not : for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him : the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.’

“ The apostles were so far from propagating the Gospel by outward force and violence, that all their proceedings were by entreaty and persuasion ; and, in case of the rejection of their message, they shook the dust from their feet as a witness against those who opposed them. If any Christians under heaven have authority in religious matters, the apostles must needs have had it before them ; but this they utterly disclaimed : ‘ Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy ; for by faith ye stand.’ Yea, the Lord Jesus, when they strove for dominion, forbade them, saying — ‘ Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great, exercise authority upon them ; but IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONGST YOU.’ Even so saith Peter — ‘ Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly ; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being LORDS OVER GOD’S HERITAGE, but being EXAMPLES OF THE FLOCK.’ Why then should the Christian religion be built and supported by violence and cruelty, when the foundation was laid, and the work carried on through the apostolic age, and several hundred years after, by means quite contrary, is a question to be resolved by those, whose strongest argument in support of their religion, is, ‘ TAKE HIM, JAILER.’ Such is the difference between the way which the apostles and primitive Christians took, in promoting the Gospel and approving themselves to be the ministers of God, and the way now adopted by the national clergy.

“ O, ye rulers of the world and inhabitants of the earth, this was the way which the Lord of all things, and his disciples, took to plant and establish the Gospel in the hearts and affections of the sons of men. Be ye not, therefore, unlike those whom you say you follow, by imposing your doctrines and traditions by the violence of penal laws, to the imprisoning, banishing, and spoiling of the goods of conscientious persons ; causing them, as the saints of old, to be destitute, afflicted, and tormented ; although, for their innocency and uprightness, the world is not worthy of them.

“ Hath the magistrate then power to remove those out of the world, whom God would have permitted to live ? How soon may a magistrate, if guided by such doctrine, bring the

blood of the innocent upon himself and the nation ! ‘The shedding of innocent blood the Lord will not pardon.’ It therefore highly concerns all magistrates, before they persecute any for matters of faith or worship, to see that they have a better warrant for so doing, than the word of men ; which will not secure them ‘in that day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel.’ When ‘the book shall be opened, the dead, both small and great, shall stand before God, to be judged by what is written therein, according to their works.’ As the Lord Jesus declares— ‘The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge you at the last day ;’ and this is his word—‘Let both the tares and the wheat grow together’ in the field of the world, ‘until the harvest.’ ”*

Notwithstanding the unsuccessful conference, as already related, the king having assembled his parliament, still avowed the liberality of his principles and intentions, and frankly declared to the two houses, that he should not think him to be a *wise* man, or a *friend* to his person, who attempted to persuade him to the breach of his promise so solemnly made in a foreign land, and so repeatedly renewed since his return. As the election of the members of this parliament had been made, according to the wishes of the ministry, in favour of high principles, it was suggested to the king, as the best expedient of obtaining whatever he desired, to sacrifice the nonconformists to the parliament. It is not very strange that a prince of his character, who had secretly embraced the Roman catholic religion, or, to speak more properly, had no religion at all, should not think it a point of honour to defend the presbyterians, at the hazard of losing the affection of his parliament. He began, therefore, to use evasion ; and, by talking in general terms of persons troubling the peace of the kingdom, furnished his two houses with a pretence of treating the nonconformists with rigour, as disturbers of the public tranquillity. He left the care of religion to the parliament, as a thing too difficult for him ; by which he renounced his royal promises, and openly insulted all his loving subjects.†

These were the times for men to act with duplicity and hy-

* Crosby, vol. ii. p. 109.

† Rapin, vol. ii. p. 625, 627.

pocrisy. Under the protectorate, the enemies of Cromwell and his government, to accomplish their own ends, professed themselves the friends of humanity and liberty. But at the restoration, “these very men shook off this disguise, and reverted to their old principles of high prerogative and absolute power. They said they were for liberty, when it was a means to distress one who they thought had no right to govern; but when the government returned to its old channel, they were still as firm to all prerogative notions, and as great enemies to liberty as ever.”*

With such men at the head of public affairs, it was not difficult to foresee the approaching storm, and those who scrupled conformity were not disappointed. The “Corporation Act,” in direct violation of his majesty’s stipulations, obtained the royal assent; by which all who refused conformity to the rites and ceremonies of the church, were excluded from municipal offices. This act required all persons on entering upon offices of public trust, not only to take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, but to make the following declarations:—“I do declare and believe, that it is not lawful upon any pretence whatsoever to take arms against the king; and that I do abhor that traitorous position of taking arms by his authority against his person, or against those that are commissioned by him.—I do declare, that there lies no obligation upon me from the solemn league and covenant, and that the same was an unlawful oath imposed on the subject against the laws and liberties of the kingdom.”—The statute then enacted, “that no person shall hereafter be elected or chosen into any offices or places of trust, that shall not within one year next before such election have taken the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, according to the rites of the church of England; and that every person so elected shall take the aforesaid oaths, and subscribe the said declaration at the same time when the oath for the due execution of the said places and offices shall be respectively administered.”

Thus, all persons whose religious principles constrained them conscientiously to refuse conformity to the established episcopal church, were at once expelled and excluded from

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 71.

every branch of the magistracy, and rendered incapable of serving their country in the meanest civil offices. If this oath had declared it unlawful, on any pretence, to take arms against the established *government*, there had been nothing in it extraordinary. But in this instance, the king was supposed to be the sole master of the government; which is manifestly false, since he can neither make nor repeal any law without the concurrence of the parliament, consequently the sovereign authority does not reside in him alone. It is difficult to mark the exact degree of obedience due to the king, or the parliament, when they may be disunited; because in their union, according to the English constitution, consists the essence of the government. To say, therefore, that it was not lawful upon *any pretence whatsoever* to resist the king or the parliament, was properly speaking to surrender the liberties of the nation to the mercy of the one party.*

Another memorable statute was now made against the quakers. These people having declared openly against the use of carnal weapons in all cases of hostility, had the courage to petition the house of lords for a toleration of their religion and for a dispensation from taking oaths, which they considered as unlawful; not through any disaffection to the government, but from the declarations of the New Testament. Their own affirmation was, in their opinion, equally binding as any oath. Instead of obtaining relief, their petition was rejected; and an act passed which prohibited their assemblies, confiscated their property, and doomed their persons to banishment. The statute enacted, "That if any person shall maintain that the taking of an oath is altogether unlawful, and contrary to the word of God, from and after the 24th day of March, in this present year of our Lord, 1661, shall wilfully and obstinately refuse to take an oath, where, by the laws of the realm, he or she is bound to take the same, or shall endeavour to persuade any other person to refuse and forbear taking the same, or shall by printing, writing, or otherwise, go about to maintain and defend that the taking of an oath is altogether unlawful; and if the said persons, called quakers, shall at any time after the said 24th of March depart from the places of their habita-

tions, and assemble themselves to the number of five, or more, of the age of sixteen years or upwards, at any one time, in any place, under pretence of joining in religious worship not authorized by the laws of this realm, that then in every such case, the party so offending being thereof lawfully convicted, by the verdict of twelve men, or by his own confession, or by the notorious evidence of the fact, shall forfeit to the king's majesty, for the first offence, such sum as shall be imposed upon him not exceeding *five pounds*;—for the second offence, a sum not exceeding *ten pounds*;—and for his third offence, shall abjure the realm, and shall be transported to any of his majesty's plantations beyond the seas.”*

The society of friends having obtained early intelligence of this bill, so destructive of the rights and liberties of mankind, several leading persons among them attended upon the parliament, and were admitted at the bar of the house, to offer their reasons against the passing of the act, but altogether without success. Political considerations, party animosity, and bigoted exasperated zeal for the church, so far actuated the spirits of the majority, that all appeals to their reason, their humanity, or even to Christianity, were in vain.† One circumstance which served to aggravate the injustice and severity of this act, was, that the quakers had lately presented to the king and council an open statement of their conscientious scruples; expressed in strong language their loyalty to his majesty; and firmly declared, “that it had ever been with them an established principle, confirmed by a consonant practice, to enter into no plots, combinations, or rebellions against government, nor to seek deliverance from injustice or oppression by any such means.”

Other circumstances also greatly contributed to show the iniquity, as well as the inconsistency of this statute. In addition to the repeated royal pledges of liberty of conscience in general, his majesty had openly and unequivocally promised, not long before the act passed, that the quakers in particular should in no wise suffer for their religious opinions or practice; and in honourable conformity to the royal word, his majesty released many hundreds of them from prison, and put a

* Sewel, vol. i. p. 552, 553.

† Gough, vol. i. p. 499, 500.

stop to the cruelties of persecution on the other side the Atlantic.*

Perhaps no denomination of Christians had, at this early period, more clear and consistent views of the principles of religious liberty, than the society of friends. These views they published to the world, and presented to the government before the above act was passed, in a small treatise, entitled, "The Case of free Liberty of Conscience in the Exercise of Faith and Religion, presented to the King and both Houses of Parliament." In this piece they showed, that to deprive honest and peaceable people of liberty of conscience in the worship of God, was unjust, an intrenchment on God's sovereignty, and an usurpation of his authority. They considered that the imposition of religion upon men, was the way to fill the land with hypocrites; and showed from substantial reasons, that to persecute people for the exercise of religion and the worship of God according to their own views, must unavoidably tend to the destruction of trade, husbandry, and commerce. Such was the madness of persecution, that those who were called heretics were punished as malefactors; whereas, said they, drunkards and other profane persons went unpunished; therefore they agreed in opinion with the judicious bishop Taylor, who said—"Why are we so zealous against those we call heretics, and yet great friends to drunkards, and swearers, and fornicators, and intemperate and idle persons? I am certain a drunkard is as contrary to the laws of Christianity as a heretic; and I am also sure that I know what drunkenness is, but I am not so sure that such an opinion is heresy."†

With all these important truths and glaring facts before their eyes, the government passed the unnatural and unmerciful statute. What then were the effects and consequences of this parliamentary enactment? Its influence, indeed, was dreadful. Though the quakers, it was well known, were very far from sedition or disaffection to the government, upwards of *four thousand two hundred* were cast into prison, for their religious scruples; many of whom were grievously beaten, and their clothes torn off their backs and carried away! Some

* Sewel, vol. i. p. 432, 473.

† Ibid. p. 492.

of them were crammed into noisome dungeons, unfit for the habitation of dogs ; and some prisons were so crowded with both men and women, that there was scarcely room for them all to sit down ! In Cheshire sixty-eight persons were thus crammed and locked up in one small room ! No age or sex found commiseration. Persons of seventy years of age or upwards, were, without pity or remorse, subjected to these rigorous imprisonments ; and in many instances they were forced to lie on the cold ground, not permitted the use of straw on which to rest their weary heads, being kept for days without victuals ! No wonder that multitudes grew sick and died by such barbarous treatment ;* for every drop of whose blood, God will assuredly make inquisition of those by whom it was shed.

Thus, in the first year after king Charles's restoration, was the nation taught how little dependence was to be placed in that monarch's most solemn promises ; and thus, at this early period, were the insincerity and infatuation of the restored house of Stuart made unequivocally manifest, and which, at no distant period, wrought their final ruin. " Entrust not the care of your *souls* to princes or to prelates," had been the seasonable admonition of England for many generations : but king Charles II. had no sooner received the sceptre from the hands of the people, who might then have transferred it, as they afterwards did transfer it, to other hands, than he or rather his agents began, in contempt of every principle of honour and equity, to persecute, with fines, imprisonment, and abjuration, multitudes of his best and most peaceable subjects, merely on the score of their religious opinions, which he had repeatedly pledged should never be subject to the least molestation.

Let the reader, however, only recollect the true character of this prince and his government, and he will cease to wonder at all this injustice and enormity. The restoration, says bishop Burnet, brought with it the throwing off the very professions of virtue and piety ; and all ended in entertainments and drunkenness, which overrun the three kingdoms. The king had a good understanding ; and knew well the state of affairs both at home and abroad. He had a softness of temper that charmed all who came near him, till they found how little they could

* Sewel, vol. ii. p. 1, 2.

depend on good looks, kind words, and fair promises ; in which he was liberal to excess, because he intended nothing by them, but to get rid of importunities, and to silence all further pressing upon him. He seemed to have no sense of religion. Both in prayers and the sacrament, he took care to satisfy the people, that he felt no concern about that in which he was employed. He was very far from being a hypocrite, unless his assisting in those performances was a sort of hypocrisy, as no doubt it was : but he was sure not to increase that by the least appearance of religion. “ He said once to me,” adds this prelate, “ that he was no atheist, but he could not think God would make a man miserable only for taking a little pleasure out of the way. He disguised his popery to the last : but when he talked freely, he could not help speaking against the liberty that under the reformation all men took of *inquiring into matters of religion* ! for, from their inquiring into matters of religion, they carried the humour farther, to inquire into matters of state. He often said, that he thought government was a much safer and easier thing where the authority was believed to be *infallible*, and the faith and submission of the people was *implicit* !”* The book of Common-prayer, therefore, impiously insulted God, by calling this profligate monarch, “ our most *religious* and gracious king.”

The religion of the late times was discountenanced by the king, his courtiers, and the common people, and its name was seldom mentioned without contempt. What could be expected from a prince of such character, and of such principles ? His most solemn reiterated promises were only as the spider’s web. What then could be expected when he arrogantly claimed the sovereign power of providing a religion for all the nation, and of granting that degree of religious liberty which he deemed most conducive to his own ends and purposes ? On the principle of this unhallowed claim, he had an equal right to provide and establish throughout his dominions, the religion of Mahomet or of the Hindoos, as that of Jesus of Nazareth ; and had he adopted either the one or the other of these measures, instead of that which took place, the zealous advocates of the political establishments of religion could not, without

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 93.

doing violence to their own sentiments, have said to their prince, "What doest thou?" Allowing him or his government uncontrollable authority to establish religion, and to grant liberty of conscience as a favour, they must have allowed him authority to abolish religion, or establish any other religion, or destroy liberty of conscience; and on the adoption of any of these measures, they were bound, on their own principles, tamely to submit their consciences and their souls to the odious domination.

SECTION II.

The Act of Uniformity subversive of Religious Liberty.

NOTWITHSTANDING the unpropitious attempts to promote a friendly reconciliation, and the melancholy prospects which immediately followed, as related in the foregoing section, some of the leading presbyterians continued to use their interest with men in power, to obtain an act of parliament founded on the principles of his majesty's declaration; when lord Clarendon, together with other leading courtiers, flattered them with some hope of success. But when the case was brought to the trial, since the election of the new parliament was so much in favour of the principles of intolerance, their expectations were disappointed; and all their attempts to secure peace and union were completely thwarted.

The lord-chancellor at first professedly united with the king to promote a reconciliation among the various parties, and to secure favour and protection to all denominations. His head and hand were chiefly concerned in his majesty's declarations; while he openly advocated the cause of moderation and friendly union. In his speech addressed to the parliament, he said—"It is a consideration that must make every religious heart bleed, to see religion, which should be the strongest obligation and cement of affection, and brotherly kindness and compassion, now made by the perverse wranglings of passionate and froward men, the ground of all animosity, hatred, malice, and revenge; and this unruly and unmanly passion, I fear, too frequently transports those who are in the right, as well as

those who are in the wrong, and leaves the latter more excusable than the former. Men who find their manners and dispositions very conformable in all the necessary obligations of human nature, avoid one another's conversation, and grow first unsociable, then uncharitable to each other, because one cannot think as the other doth.*

His lordship soon altered his tone ; and, upon the opening of the parliament which passed the act of uniformity, he delivered an harangue full of vehemence, misrepresentation, and abuse, against all who scrupled conformity. He declared to the two houses, that they were the great *physicians* of the kingdom ; and then applying this character, he added—“ There is a sort of *patients*, that I must recommend to your utmost vigilance, your *utmost severity*, and to *no part of your lenity and indulgence* ; those who are so far from valuing your prescriptions, that they look not upon you as their physicians, but their patients ; those who, instead of repenting of any thing they have done amiss, repeat every day the same crimes, for the oblivion whereof the act of indemnity was provided. These are the seditious preachers, who cannot be contented to be dispensed with for their full obedience to some laws established, without reproaching and inveighing against those laws howsoever established ; who tell their auditors, that the apostle meant, when he commanded them to stand to their liberties, that they should stand to their arms ; and who, by repeating the very expressions, and teaching the very doctrine they did in the year 1640, sufficiently declare, that they have no mind that twenty years should put an end to the miseries we have undergone. What good Christian can think without horror, of these ministers of the Gospel, who by their function should be messengers of peace, and are in their practices the only trumpeters of war, and incendiaries towards rebellion ? If the person and place can aggravate the offence, as no doubt it does before God and men, methinks the preaching of rebellion and treason from the *pulpit*, should be as much worse than advancing it in the market, as poisoning a man at the communion, would be worse than killing him at a tavern.”

After much severe and vehement language, his lordship

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 229.

concluded his furious harangue, saying—"If you do not provide for the thorough quenching of these firebrands, king, lords, and commons, will be their meanest subjects, and the whole kingdom kindled into one general flame!"*

The members of the two houses were already more than sufficiently influenced by the spirit and principles of churchmen; but the rhetoric of the chancellor's speech, with the interest he had at court, deepened the impression on their minds, and proved one principal occasion of passing the memorable act, as it now stands on our ecclesiastical records. Other causes, indeed, greatly contributed to the adoption of this political enactment. As is usual in such cases, the alarm of plots against both church and state was sounded in every direction, when in fact no plot existed; and this proved a powerful means of rendering the nonconformists sufficiently odious, and urged to the adoption of the uncatholic measure. The earl of Clarendon was accused of publishing these false alarms, as a piece of court artifice; and there undoubtedly "were great appearances of foul dealing among the fiercer sort." Those in holy orders were not exempt. For, according to my author, the concern of the bishops was, not only to refuse all alteration for the ease or accommodation of others, "but to make the terms of conformity much stricter than they had been before the war: so it was resolved to maintain conformity to the height."†

It is surprising to recollect how very little effect the consideration of the late national calamities had upon the clergy after the restoration. It might have been expected, that they would with great caution and horror have avoided all those measures, which, by unhappy experience, had exposed their country to ruin, and have blushed to mention those doctrines, by the propagation of which that event had been so manifestly accelerated. But the fact proved, with glaring evidence, how little compassion they had for the sufferings of their country, and how little regard they had for the consciences or the souls of their fellow-subjects, when placed in the balance with their hopes of preferment, and their irreconcilable hatred of all others. They, generally, fell into all the maxims and de-

* Collier, vol. ii. p. 888.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 182, 184.

signs of an abandoned and licentious court, and extolled the wisdom and justice of its proceedings.

To furnish the reader with a view of the true spirit and principles of the dominant party, it will be proper to observe, that the king had been for some time negotiating his intended marriage with the Infanta of Portugal, a notorious Roman catholic; and that upon the communication of this intelligence to his two houses of parliament, the lords and commons waited upon his majesty at Whitehall, expressing their humble and thankful acknowledgments for communicating to them his royal intentions, which they could not but receive with *joy* and *satisfaction*; and with all earnestness should beg a blessing upon it, and a speedy accomplishment of it!* The royal nuptials, so congenial to the sentiments and wishes of the two houses, were consummated about the time the famous act in question took effect.

These were the men, with the prince at their head, who had the legislative formation and establishment of a *protestant* church for all the people in England; and these were the men who formed and passed into law, the ever-memorable act of uniformity, on which the present church of England was permanently founded, and on which it has rested without variation to the present day.

His majesty now threw off his disguise, and openly discovered the true spirit of the time. Having appointed the bishops and clergy in convocation to review the liturgy, and to present, for his approbation, such alterations and additions as they deemed advisable, he sent it to the house of lords to be established by act of parliament. At the same time, in a speech which he made to the commons, he said—"Gentlemen, I hear you are very zealous for the church, and very solicitous, and even jealous, that there is not expedition enough used in that affair. I thank you for it; since I presume it proceeds from a good root of piety and devotion. But I must tell you, I have the worst luck in the world, if after all the reproaches of being a papist while I was abroad, I am suspected of being a presbyterian now I am come home. I know you will not take it unkindly, if I tell you, that I am as zealous

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 231.

for the church of England, as any of you can be, and am enough acquainted with its enemies on all sides ; that I am as much in love with the book of Common-prayer as you can wish, and have *prejudice enough* to those who do not love it, who, I hope, in time will be better informed, and change their minds ; and you may be confident I do as much desire to see a uniformity settled as any amongst you. I pray you trust me in that affair : I promise you to hasten the despatch of it with all convenient speed : you may rely upon me in it. I have transmitted the book of Common-prayer, with those alterations and additions which have been presented to me by the convocation, to the house of peers, with my approbation, that the act of uniformity may relate to it : so that I presume it will be shortly despatched there.”*

The memorable statute found no difficulty in passing the two houses and obtaining the royal assent, entitled, “ An Act for the Uniformity of public prayers, and administration of sacraments and other rites and ceremonies ; and for establishing the form of making, ordaining, and consecrating bishops, priests, and deacons in the church of England.” After the preamble, it is enacted—“ That all and singular ministers within this realm of England, dominion of Wales, and town of Berwick upon Tweed, shall be bound to say and use the morning prayer, evening prayer, celebration and administration of both the sacraments, and all other the public and common prayers, in such order and form as is mentioned in the Book of Common-prayer. And that the morning and evening prayers therein contained, shall upon every Lord’s day, and upon all other days and occasions, and at the times therein appointed, be openly and solemnly read by every minister or curate, in every church, chapel, or other place of public worship, within this realm of England and places aforesaid.

“ And to the end that uniformity in the public worship of God, which is so much desired, may be speedily effected, be it further enacted, that every parson, vicar, or other minister, who now enjoyeth any ecclesiastical benefice or promotion, within this realm of England or places aforesaid, shall in the church, chapel, or place of public worship belonging to his

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 269.

said benefice or promotion, upon some Lord's day before the feast of St. Bartholomew in the year of our Lord 1662, openly, publicly, and solemnly read the morning and evening prayer appointed to be read by and according to the said book of Common-prayer, at the times thereby appointed; and after such reading thereof, shall openly and publicly, before the congregation there assembled, declare his *unfeigned assent* and *consent* to the use of all things in the said book contained and prescribed, in these words and no other:—I, A. B. do hereby declare my *unfeigned assent* and *consent to all* and *every thing* contained and prescribed in and by the book, entitled, 'The Book of Common-prayer, &c.'—And that all and every such person, who shall, without some lawful impediment to be allowed and approved by the ordinary of the place, neglect or refuse to do the same within the time aforesaid, or, in case of such impediment, within one month after such impediment is removed, shall, *ipso facto*, be deprived of all his spiritual promotions: and that from thenceforth it shall be lawful to and for all patrons and donors of all such spiritual promotions, according to their respective rights and titles, to present or collate to the same, as though the person or persons so offending were dead. And that every person who shall hereafter be presented or collated to any ecclesiastical benefice or promotion, shall, within two months next after he shall be in the actual possession of the said ecclesiastical benefice or promotion, openly and publicly, before the congregation, make the declaration aforesaid; and that every such person, who shall neglect or refuse to do the same within the time aforesaid, shall, *ipso facto*, be deprived of all his said ecclesiastical benefices and promotions; and that from thenceforth it shall be lawful to and for all patrons and donors of all such spiritual promotions, to present or collate to the same, as though the person or persons so offending were dead.

“And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that every dean, canon, and prebendary, of every cathedral or collegiate church, and all masters and other heads, fellows, chaplains, and tutors of any college, hall, house of learning, or hospital, and every public professor and reader in either of the universities, and in every college elsewhere, and every parson, vicar, curate, lecturer, and every other person in holy

orders, and every *schoolmaster* keeping any public or *private school*, and every *person* instructing or teaching any youth in any house or *private family*, as a tutor or schoolmaster, who upon the first day of May, in the year of our Lord 1662, or at any time hereafter shall occupy any of these offices, he shall before the feast of St. Bartholomew in the said year of our Lord 1662, or at, or before his admission or possession, subscribe the declaration or acknowledgment following :—‘ I, A. B. do declare, that it is not lawful upon any pretence whatsoever to take arms against the king ; and that I do abhor that traitorous position of taking arms by his authority against his person, or against those that are commissioned by him ; and that I will conform to the liturgy of the church of England, as it is now by law established. And I do declare, that I do hold there lies no obligation upon me, or any other person, from the oath commonly called, ‘ The Solemn League and Covenant,’ to endeavour *any change* or *alteration* of government either in *church* or state ; and that the same was in itself an unlawful oath, and imposed on the subjects of this realm against the known laws and liberties of this kingdom.’—And all persons in the aforesaid offices, who shall refuse to subscribe this declaration before the archbishop, bishop, or ordinary, shall be utterly disabled, and, *ipso facto*, be deprived of the same : and all such offices and promotions shall be disposed of, as if the persons so failing were naturally dead.

“ And if any schoolmaster, or other person, instructing or teaching youth in any private house or family, as a tutor or schoolmaster, shall instruct or teach any youth before license obtained from his respective archbishop, bishop, or ordinary, according to the laws and statutes of this realm, for which he shall pay twelve-pence only, and before such subscription and acknowledgment as aforesaid ; then every such schoolmaster and others, instructing and teaching as aforesaid, shall for the *first* offence suffer *three months* imprisonment without bail or mainprise ; and for every *second* and *other* offence, shall suffer *three months* imprisonment without bail or mainprise, and also forfeit to his majesty the sum of *five pounds*.

“ Provided always, and be it enacted, that from and after the feast of St. Bartholomew, in the year of our Lord 1662,

no person who is now incumbent, or in possession of any parsonage, vicarage, or benefice, and who is not already in holy orders by *episcopal* ordination, or shall not before the said feast-day of St. Bartholomew, be ordained priest or deacon, according to the form of *episcopal* ordination, shall have, hold or enjoy the said ecclesiastical promotion within this kingdom of England, or the dominion of Wales, or town of Berwick upon Tweed; but shall be utterly disabled, and, *ipso facto*, deprived of the same; and all his ecclesiastical promotions shall be void, as if he was naturally dead.

“And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that the several laws and statutes of this realm, which have been formerly made, and are now in force, for the uniformity of prayer and administration of the sacraments, within this realm of England and places aforesaid, shall stand in full force and strength, to all intents and purposes whatsoever, for the establishing and confirming of the said Book of Common-prayer; and shall be applied, practised, and put in use for the punishing of all offences contrary to the said laws, with relation to the said book and no other.”

From these copious extracts, containing the substance of this extraordinary law, the reader will easily perceive how far it subverted the native rights and liberties of the church of God, and how exceedingly obnoxious it must have been to all persons of candour and liberality. The church of England resting for its very existence on this intolerant and cruel act, was erected on a foundation widely different from that of the apostolic churches mentioned in the New Testament. It was manifestly built upon the decision of king, lords, and commons, not “upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.” The church of England, under the direction of this statute, sought to accomplish an object widely different from any thing proposed to be attained by the founders of Christianity. Their chief design was to promote the conversion and salvation of souls, with the worship of God “in spirit and in truth,” by means only of generous entreaty and mild persuasion: but the professed design of this act was to suppress, by force, all diversity of religious opinions, and to establish universal agreement in the public worship of God, which was in the highest degree

preposterous, and absolutely impracticable. It is equally beyond the power of any legislative enactment to suppress religious opinions, or to secure universal agreement on religious subjects, as it is to create a world, or to annihilate the universe. The nation, by such measures, may be divided into sects and schisms—into slaves and oppressors; but rational man cannot be coerced to religious opinions. The human mind may be crushed by the weight of penal sanctions, but so long as man is capable of thinking, it is absolutely impossible to implant religion in his heart and life by political taxation; and, so long as Christianity places every man in a state of responsibility to God *alone*, in all things pertaining to faith and religion, every attempt to control his religion, not only betrays insufferable arrogance, but is a direct effort, so far as the attempt is made, to transfer his religious obligations from the Creator, into the hands of the creature. So far as any one makes this lofty claim, it is an attempt to disable men from using their intellectual powers on religious subjects; it robs them of the right of private judgment—a blessing coeval with human existence; and transforms the souls of men into mere machines, under the sovereign control of a fellow-mortal.

On the supposition that princes and parliaments, or any other body of men, actually possess power and authority to enforce Christianity by human laws, and could they, conformably to this act, extend that power and authority even to the suppression of diversity of opinions, and to the security of universal agreement among men, we think the method adopted by this legislative measure was exceedingly objectionable; by imperiously demanding all the beneficed and officiating ministers in the kingdom to declare their “unfeigned assent and consent to all and every thing” contained in the Book of Common-prayer; and by denouncing the tremendous penalty of deprivation, *ipso facto*, upon all who claimed the liberty of thinking and judging otherwise. The propagation of Christianity, and the enforcement of divine worship, by such pains and penalties, will never prove a divine warrant. All attempts to establish the Christian religion at the point of the sword, or by the penal laws of the civil magistrate, form a striking resemblance of the methods used by Mahomet, in the establishment of his dogmas and worship; and all such intolerant and

disgraceful proceedings ought, in justice, to be associated with those of the false prophet and the Inquisition.

This act was not even intended to cleanse the church of ignorant and profane ministers; and was so constructed, that it could not be efficacious to her purification from error and corruption; consequently it was inadequate to the propagation and establishment of *religion*: it could only avail for the expulsion of the conscientious and the pious from the ecclesiastical communion; and, consequently, be injurious to the religion of Jesus Christ. In addition to the foregoing declaration, it required all officiating ministers to declare, that it was "not lawful on any pretence whatever to take arms against the king." This was a demand to which they could not concede without sacrificing the rights of the nation; and without making a declaration in direct opposition to the practice almost universally adopted by the clergy and laity at the revolution, as will be particularly noticed in this volume. The preposterous demand was enforced by similar intolerance as the former; for all who could not bring their understandings and consciences to make this declaration, were utterly disabled, and, *ipso facto*, deprived of their office and promotion, which were to be disposed of, as if they were naturally dead. And as if there had been something supernatural or miraculous in episcopal ordination, all the ministers in the kingdom who had not received this kind of ordination, were required to be treated with similar intolerance.

This act was very far from breathing the spirit of Christianity, the spirit of which is charity, forbearance, long-suffering, and tender mercy. Its imperious demands extended to all *schoolmasters*, as well as to all clergymen, and required them to make the declaration last mentioned, and to procure a license from the archbishop, bishop, or ordinary, as the indispensable conditions and qualifications of their office! but in case of failure of attention to either of these particulars, they were for the first offence sentenced to three months imprisonment, and, for every subsequent offence, to similar imprisonment, with the additional penalty of five pounds!!

Notwithstanding all these obnoxious clauses in the statute, and its disgraceful infringements on the rights of mankind, a right reverend prelate openly declares, "that the world had

reason to admire not only the wisdom, but even the *moderation* of this act, as being effectually made for ministerial conformity *alone*; and leaving the *people* unable to complain of *any imposition* !”* This representation is certainly very much calculated to mislead the unwary reader. Was there, in fact, no imposition on the people? By what legislative enactment were their ministers provided, and their necessary official qualifications prescribed? Was it not by the same memorable statute, that the prayers to be offered up to Almighty God were imposed upon all the people in the land, who attended upon the public worship of the national church? They had no choice of their ministers, no choice of their forms of worship, no choice of their public prayers to God; these were all provided and *imposed* by the state. As all the people in the land were expressly prohibited from worshipping God publicly *without* the walls of the church, and all these, with all other things pertaining to public worship, were rigorously, and with heavy penalties, imposed upon the worship *within* those walls, had they no reason then to complain of imposition? And was it not the duty of all the people in the land particularly prescribed in the preamble to the act, in these remarkable words, “that *every person within this realm* may certainly know the rule, to which *he is to conform* in public worship?”

The case only requires to be fairly stated, and it will decide for itself. That the unrighteous impositions, and consequently the suppression of Christian liberty, extended to the common people, as well as to the clergy, is demonstrated from the last clause of the act itself; which unequivocally declares the revival of all the tremendous penal laws in religion to which the royal assent had been given, through the successive reigns of queen Elizabeth, king James the First, and king Charles the First, and that they “shall stand in full force and strength, to all intents and purposes whatsoever, for the establishing and confirming the Book of Common-prayer, and shall be applied, practised, and put in use for the punishing of all offences contrary to the said laws.” These terrific penal laws, at which humanity shudders, are noticed in the former volume; where their disgraceful infringement on the native

* Bp. Kennet, vol. iii. p. 243.

rights of Christians, their barbarous usurpation over the liberties of the nation, and their open repugnance to the spirit and doctrine of Christianity, are fully stated. So that it appears from the very *words* and *design* of the act, not only that it introduced new infringements and oppressions, but recognised, revived, and put in full force the long train of ecclesiastical statutes which had been adopted for several generations, against all classes in society who scrupled conformity to the political church. Here we might, without the least violation of Christian charity present a copious recapitulation of antichristian enactments; but we forbear, referring the reader to the detail of particulars already enumerated.

The great error of the protestants in their departure from the Romish communion, was, that in rejecting its grossest errors, they did not raze the foundation which supported them—the tyranny of imposition. Having obtained their release from this yoke of bondage, but still imposing their own doctrines or forms of worship upon each other, and requiring declarations and subscriptions to their own devices, looks as if they were still fond of the *power*, and only disliked the *name*, of popery. They could not help knowing, and even owning, that catholics had an equal right to enforce the impositions of the popish church, as they had to enforce the impositions of their protestant church; unless they could prove their own particular impositions to be really and absolutely *infallible*, as the papists falsely pretended. But their disclaiming *infallibility*, as one of the greatest and most dangerous of popish errors, ought to have constrained them to disclaim every particle and degree of spiritual power which it assumed; and, proceeding on this plan, they would no doubt have promoted and secured the purity, peace, and unity of the Christian church. If, as the avowed ground of the reformation, they had received the inspired Scriptures as the *only rule* of faith and worship, with the right of private judgment as the universal birthright of man; they would, in perfect conformity to these honourable principles, have refrained from all impositions on others; and, zealously promoting their own opinions by mild entreaty and sound persuasion, the only weapons to be used in this warfare, they would have left unfettered Christianity to rest on its own evidence, and work its own way.

Comparing the act of uniformity with his majesty's reiterated pledges of liberty, we cannot but perceive, how little regard he had for his own promises, and how little concern his ministers, who were the active promoters of it, had for his character and reputation. This ecclesiastical statute took effect on *Bartholomew-day*, August 24, 1662; the day of the massacre at Paris, and a day ever-memorable in the annals of the church of England. The arrival of this day caused great gladness in some persons, but extreme sorrow in others, and a variety of reflections in all. The scrupulous ministers in London, at this painful juncture, presented their humble petition to the king, addressing him in these words :

“ May it please your majesty.—Upon former experience of your majesty's tenderness and indulgence to your obedient and loyal subjects, in which number we can with all clearness reckon ourselves; we, some of the ministers within your city of London, who are likely by the late act of uniformity to be cast out of all public service in the ministry, because we cannot in conscience conform to all things required in the said act, have taken the boldness humbly to cast ourselves and concerns at your majesty's feet, desiring that of your princely wisdom and compassion, you would take some effectual course whereby we may be continued in the exercise of our ministry, to teach your people obedience to God and your majesty. And we doubt not but by our dutiful and peaceable carriage therein, we shall render ourselves not altogether unworthy of so great a favour.”*

This petition was presented to the king only three days after the act took effect, by Dr. Manton, Dr. Bates, Mr. Calamy, and others, when they declared their own and their brethren's unshaken fidelity to his majesty; upon which the king promised that he would take the business into consideration. The next day the matter was fully debated in council, his majesty being present, who declared his intentions to grant an indulgence, if it were practicable. The earl of Manchester, the earl of Bristol, and others recommended, with great earnestness, the exercise of lenity and moderation. Bishop Sheldon, on the other hand, pressed the execution of the statute. En-

* Calamy's Contin. vol. i. p. 10.

gland, he said, was accustomed to obey laws: so, while they stood on that ground, they were safe, and had no need to fear the dangers which seemed to threaten them. He intimated that only a very small number would suffer themselves to be deprived, and that most of those who now scrupled would conform; while he engaged to fill all the vacant pulpits in London, more to the satisfaction of the people than they had been previous to this event. His lordship declared, that it was now too late to think of suspending the law; that the measure would disable him from maintaining his episcopal authority; that it would render the legislature ridiculous; and that both the church and state would be filled with endless distractions and convulsions!* “By this seasonable interposition,” says another prelate, “the bishop freed the church of England from these plagues for many years.”†

On the arrival of the BLACK BARTHOLOMEW-DAY, the scrupulous ministers were struck with universal consternation; and were compelled by this act to resign their stations in the church, and in numerous instances, their only means of subsistence, and to embrace poverty, reproach, and suffering, rather than yield their consciences and their souls to the spiritual usurpation of man. Most of these conscientious ministers became nonconformists, not so much on account of the unlawfulness or inexpediency of ecclesiastical establishments; but because the conditions, on which alone they could have retained their connexion with the national church, were such as it was well known they could not conscientiously observe. The act was deliberately and intentionally framed to exclude them from the church: so that it produced the greatest separation, and some churchmen will say the greatest *schism*, that ever occurred in any protestant church in Christendom. The noncompliance of some of them, says one of their greatest opponents, no doubt proceeded purely from a *tender conscience*, which they could not resist; and all such ought to have been pitied and applauded, rather than condemned.‡

It is not easy, nor is it necessary, to ascertain the exact number of clergymen who were silenced or ejected by this

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 192.—Calamy's Contin. vol. i. p. 11.

† Biog. Brit. vol. iii. p. 135.

‡ Echard, p. 802.

fatal act. Mr. Baxter affirms, in one place, that there were eighteen hundred ejected at once by this act, and many hundreds before the act took effect; and, in another place, upon the arrival of Bartholomew-day, about eighteen hundred or two thousand ministers were silenced and ejected.* By this memorable act, another writer says, “it is well known, that nearly five and twenty hundred faithful ministers of the Gospel were now silenced on one day, because they could not comply with certain things which they counted *sinful*, but which the imposers confessed to be *indifferent*.”†

Notwithstanding this dreadful havock, the act, says bishop Kennet, was found necessary for the *peace* and *safety* of the *state*, as well as for the *prosperity* and *glory* of the church!! He adds, that it would certainly have had the desired and most happy effect of unity and peace, if the government had been in earnest with the execution of it; and if the ministers inclined to separation had not been encouraged by the connivance of the court, and the promised indulgence of the king.‡ Whatever deficiency of zeal in this good work the government or the king might betray, it is abundantly manifest from the above estimates, that the bishops and other ecclesiastical governors were not altogether idle: being furnished with this powerful engine, they did not fail to use it, and their fame for intolerance and persecution will be handed down to the latest posterity.

Bishop Burnet observes, that some few, and but few, of the episcopalians were troubled at this severity, or at all apprehensive of the effects that would follow. He then adds—“Here were many men much valued, some on better grounds, and others on worse, who were now cast out ignominiously, reduced to great poverty, provoked by much spiteful usage, and cast upon those popular practices that both their principles and their circumstances seemed to justify, of forming separate congregations, and of diverting men from the public worship, and from considering their successors as the lawful pastors of those churches in which they had served.” Upon this learned prelate’s statement, therefore, if this great separation was ac-

* Life of Baxter, part ii. p. 286, 385.

† Mather’s Hist. b. iii. p. 4.

‡ Kennet, vol. iii. p. 236, 243.

tual *schism*, it is manifest to all the world who were the occasion of it, and consequently who were the *schismatics*. His lordship further adds, that many of the silenced ministers were distinguished by their zeal and abilities. They cast themselves upon the providence of God, and the charity of their friends, which had a fair appearance, as of men that were ready to suffer persecution for their consciences. This begot esteem, and raised compassion: whereas the old clergy, now much enriched, were as much despised.*

“The Bartholomew-day,” says the renowned Locke, “was fatal to our church and religion in throwing out a very great number of worthy, learned, pious and orthodox divines, who could not come up to several things in the act. And it is on this occasion worth your knowledge, that so great was the zeal in carrying on this church-affair, and so blind was the obedience required, that if you compare the time of the passing of this act, with the time allotted for the clergy to subscribe the Book of Common-prayer, you will plainly find it could not be printed and distributed so as one man in *forty* could have seen and read the book to which they did so perfectly *assent* and *consent*.”†

Men of such character and such principles as these nonconformists were certainly deserving of more humane treatment, than that which they received from the established church; and when it is recollected that so great a number of ministers were compelled to give up their livings, and many of them even the prospect of subsistence, it will certainly be regarded as an astonishing sacrifice of temporal interest to integrity and conscience, and as exhibiting a striking proof of the deep impression which their religion made on their hearts. Every consideration, except their duty to conscience and to God, united with great power and force to allure them to conformity; but they were resolved to part with all, rather than offend their consciences and displease their God. A monument, durable as time, ought therefore to be erected in remembrance of their silent exposure and peaceable resistance of such spiritual cruelty, and of their conscientious and unshaken fidelity to Jesus Christ.

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 185, 192.

† Hist. of Stuarts, vol. ii. p. 307.

As this act broke the peace of the church, and caused an awful division among its members, which still remains unhealed, it cannot be improper to inquire, who were its principal authors and promoters? It has already been observed from bishop Burnet, that the great concern of the bishops was to make the terms of conformity more severe than they were before the civil wars. We have seen also the great change in the spirit and measures of lord Clarendon, who, out of concern for the bishops' project, entertained the nonconformists with good words, while he was undermining the ground on which they stood.* Dr. Bates, a person not deficient in moderation, speaking of the passing of this act, says—"that the old clergy from wrath and revenge, and the young gentry from their servile compliance with the court, and their distaste for serious religion, were very active to carry on and complete it."†

The courtiers and the parliament were of one mind. The politics of the government had no disguise, and the court ministers found no difficulty in leading the willing parliament. Never was an assembly more prostituted to the pleasure of the court; nor did it ever more shamefully betray both the civil and religious liberties of the country. The members of the parliament having been chosen according to the wishes of the principal courtiers, were under their immediate influence and control, when they tamely surrendered the dearest benefits of their country into the hands of destroyers. During the progress of the bill through the two houses, a person of respectability being in company with a member of parliament, said, "I see you are laying a snare in the gate;" he replied, "Ah, if we can find any way to catch the rogues, we will have them."‡ Also when the earl of Manchester told the king, that the terms of the act were so rigid, he was afraid that many of the clergy would not comply with it; bishop Sheldon replied, "I am afraid they will."§ And when Dr. Allen signified, after the act was passed, how great a pity it was that the door was so strait, that he feared many sober ministers could not gain admission, his lordship replied; "It is no pity at all: if we had thought so many of them would have conformed, we would

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 185. † Bates' Works, p. 816. ‡ Mather, b. iii. p. 4.

§ Bates, p. 816.

have made it straiter.”* From these considerations it is too apparent, that the act was passed under the influence of prejudice and passion; but the effects of it were dreadful, and continue to this day. So that without giving the least offence, we may drop a tear, upon the remembrance of so many worthies of Israel, who were buried in one common grave!

This was an action without a precedent. So severe a penal law in religion, accompanied with so many calamities equally subversive of Christianity, as of religious liberty, had never been heard of in any reformed church throughout the Christian world. This act placed the church of England in a worse condition than that in which it stood before the commencement of the civil wars; and, as the old persecuting laws of queen Elizabeth were revived and enforced with all their rigour, and other clauses of a similar nature now enacted, not only were all the king's promises of toleration and indulgence superseded and broken; but numerous additional burdens laid upon the church of God, and many new persecutions inflicted upon men “of whom the world was not worthy.”

Historians relate, with tragical exclamation, that upwards of three-score bishops were driven at once to the island of Sardinia by the African vandals: that two hundred ministers were banished by Ferdinand, king of Bohemia: and that during the interim dreadful havock was made among the ministers of Germany. But all these put together fall short of the number ejected, and afterwards in various ways persecuted, by the act of uniformity. These protestant nonconformists were not only silenced, but suppressed from all kinds of public usefulness, and nearly buried alive. Inconceivably greater humanity and tenderness had been exercised towards the popish clergy that were ejected at the reformation. They were suffered to live quietly: but these were oppressed to the uttermost, even by their brethren who professed the same protestant faith with themselves; and not only excluded from all ecclesiastical preferment and ministerial usefulness, but turned out into a wide world without any prospect of subsistence. Not so much as a poor vicarage, nor an obscure chapel, nor even a school was left them; in confirmation of which the most ample proof, if necessary, might easily be produced.

* Palmer, vol. i. p. 33.

For what offence then were they treated thus? Only because they refused to give their full "assent and consent" to what they could not believe, and openly vow against that which appeared to them to be their duty to God. Had they opposed his majesty's restoration, or manifested the least degree of hostility to his government, or shown themselves enemies to the good order and peace of society, their afflictions would have been much more tolerable; but there was no just ground for such insinuation: on the contrary, they had discovered their zeal for the restoration, their firm obedience to his majesty's government, and their peaceable behaviour in the world, while most of them would have been content with moderate episcopacy. Those, therefore, who accuse them as schismatics, or as the friends of anarchy and confusion, know not the men, nor the painful situation in which they were placed. Had they been loose in their morals, their treatment would have seemed less severe; but they were as exemplary in their lives as any subjects in the land. Had they been meanly qualified for the ministerial work, the church might much better have spared them: but instead of this, my author adds, "we may safely defy their greatest enemies to produce, in any age or country, two thousand men better qualified for the ministerial office, or more diligent and laborious in their work."*

Here we are compelled to ask, for what end and purpose were these cruelties inflicted? To establish a *uniformity* in religion. A charming word, indeed! for the thing is still wanting, and the members of the church of England are at the greatest possible distance from a uniformity of doctrine, experience, and practice, though this legislative enactment has been in force upwards of one hundred and fifty years! It must, however, be a singular kind of uniformity that creates sects and schisms, that splits and divides the church into parties. The cruelties exercised upon the nonconformists for conscientiously declining to become members of the hierarchy, stamp indelible disgrace upon the men and the measures which sanctioned them. The charge of persecution falls most heavily upon the bishops and other dignitaries; for the king, being entirely immersed in dissipation, had very little concern about

* Palmer, vol. i. p. 35.

the religious opinions which divided the nation. It does not appear that he was naturally disposed to persecution, until he was goaded to it by others.

One grand object of this legislative interference evidently was to give pomp and dominion to religion, and to establish those impositions which in all ages have been greedily swallowed by men of lax principles; while they have proved snares to the most conscientious Christians; who will not fail to examine and decide for themselves, and act in all things with simplicity and godly sincerity, without equivocation or reserve.

The complete failure of this scheme of giving dominion to religion, and of establishing new laws and new penalties in the church of God, affords an additional comment on the Redeemer's words, "My kingdom is not of this world." To say nothing of the unpleasantness or the awful responsibility of the post, it may certainly be questioned whether an archangel would be equal to the task of ruling many millions of souls; and as Christians must expect to be outnumbered in the ordinary state of the world, they ought to be thankful that they are not called to make laws for the church, nor to sway the sceptre of their Redeemer, who alone is able to rule in the midst of his people. The influence of Christians upon the world, must not be by adding fresh laws to the government of the King of heaven, nor by devising severe temporal penalties to enforce obedience to the laws which he has given; but by the gradual effects of the Gospel on the hearts of individual converts, and the elevated tone of morals, which their sentiments and example will secretly produce in the public mind.

The active projectors of this act well knew what would be the nature of its operations; and they must have approved the consequences which they foresaw would result from it. The act was not designed to alarm the unholy, or to rouse the indolent; it left them in secure possession of their offices and their ease. It was a political institute, directed against the pious and the diligent in the church, whom it expelled from her pale; and thus the nation was abandoned to its haughty and despotic triumph over those principles in which the apostles would have gloried, and over those persons, as victims of its vengeance, whom they would have hailed as fellow-labourers in the vineyard of Christ.

Though many good men, members of the established church, have unreservedly condemned the act of uniformity; yet that act has to this day even evangelical apologists! But, it may be asked, what was the advantage to the cause of true religion when so many men, so well qualified to stem the torrent of heretical pravity, were deprived of their parochial cures? We are perfectly willing and desirous to acknowledge to the utmost, the qualifications of the pious clergy at the present day; but certainly we cannot concede that their qualifications are superior to those of Bates, Owen, Manton, Goodwin, Baxter, Howe, and many others of the nonconformists. By the silence imposed upon these men, multitudes of immortal souls were consigned to the danger of perishing for ever. Their situations and their prospects of usefulness were to them as important as those of the evangelical clergy in our day. But it is an undeniable fact, that had the measure involved the eternal misery of half the nation, the act would have passed: no consideration arising from the nature of Christianity and the spiritual state of the people, could arrest the unnatural statute in its progress, or delay its execution even for an hour.

When the Bartholomew confessors were cast out, the rulers of the church concluded that an end was put to their character and work as pastors: all the good they subsequently accomplished was done at the peril of their lives. To preach or conduct public worship was made a penal offence against the state, as really as in the days of Dioclesian or Theodosius; and the delinquents were immured in prisons, exposed to the most grievous vexations, and doomed to every species of wretchedness. Thus, by this oppressive statute, all legitimate preaching and public worship of God was confined to buildings consecrated by episcopal hands.

After the expulsion of the nonconformists, the state of the episcopal church gradually declined, till evangelical preaching became almost annihilated within its pale, and heretical pravity overspread the land. If the visible means of the salvation of mankind be of primary consideration to the Christian, the act of uniformity cannot fail of receiving his condemnation, as a measure fraught with incalculable mischief, and directly tending to accomplish the everlasting ruin of souls. If any persons

view this subject in another light, other interests than those of truth, and other fears than those which are awakened by the apprehension of men perishing in their sins, must predominate in their minds. "Forbidding the apostles to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved," was that which filled up the measure of Jewish criminality, and prepared the Jewish people for the day of Divine vengeance. The act of uniformity and the proceedings of those who enacted and enforced it against the nonconformists, were directed to accomplish a purpose precisely similar: forbidding them to speak to the people, that they might be saved.

There is a prominently striking contrast between the established church as founded on this unrighteous act, and the primitive churches of Christ as founded on the holy maxims of the New Testament. The spirit, principles and requisitions of the former bear very little resemblance to those of the latter. The primitive church was wholly spiritual, and under the entire regulation of Jesus Christ according to the New Testament: the church of England is a temporal institution, an establishment founded on a political basis, and governed by political laws. Its constitution and enactments convey very incorrect notions of what was taught by our Lord, when he said, "My kingdom is not of this world;" and all candid discerning men will easily perceive, that laws which could not be executed without silencing and ruining Christian ministers, who were exemplary in their office, and unblameable in their lives, could not originate in the authority of Jesus Christ—could not be intended for "the furtherance of the Gospel." The ejection of the Bartholomew divines could not have occurred in a purely spiritual church, nor in any church that was not inundated with secularity and corruption, being founded on a basis widely differing from the churches of Jesus Christ.

Of all the epochs in English history, the Bartholomew-day is one of the most interesting to every true Protestant, and every liberal minded Briton; therefore it ought to be embalmed in the affections of every friend of God. It is that day when ecclesiastical despotism reached its wildest extreme, and performed its most daring exploit. It is that day when the long continued struggle to purify the church from secularity and corruption was brought to a crisis. It is that day when

the most learned and religious body of clergymen that England ever produced, were degraded from their stations, and deprived of their incomes, for the unbending firmness with which they refused to wear the yoke of arbitrary power. It was that day when upwards of two thousand ministers, with their families, triumphed over the strongest feelings of human nature, and sacrificed their reputation, their interests, and their homes, to the convictions of conscience—to the cause of religious liberty—to the kingdom of God. This is an instance of integrity without a parallel in modern times, and a proof of the reality of religion which ought never to be forgotten.

Had the conformist clergy displayed this noble magnanimity of spirit, and ventured to claim this unlimited use and improvement of their souls, in perfect consistency with the peace of society, they would undoubtedly have rendered themselves obnoxious to the government, and, with their non-conforming brethren, would have felt the two-edged sword of persecution, piercing them through with many sorrows. This painful catastrophe, disgraceful to humanity! would indeed have been no depreciation of their Christian character, but would have reflected, as in the light of the sun-beams, more abundant splendour upon their principles and their practice. All the disgrace would have rested, as in fact it ought to have rested, upon the men and the measures which produced these atrocities.

The act of uniformity has, no doubt, by this time imparted all its benefits to the church. What then has it in truth accomplished? The history of the church, from the memorable Bartholomew-day to the present time, shows with demonstration, that it has totally failed to accomplish the magnificent object for which it was devised. Conformity is still wanting in the church of England. This extraordinary act has not, indeed, prevented either the idle or the profane from feeding on her spoils, and from ministering at her altars: it has absolutely failed of healing old divisions, and of preventing new animosities. The church is even now distracted with many inbred sects and parties: her ministers are now engaged in bitter contentions with one another. The parliamentary enactment is nugatory and impotent, except in the power of excluding and persecuting men of integrity and worth. As to any

effect in producing harmony of opinion and of doctrine within the pale of the church, it has for several generations proved itself to be an unprofitable and dead letter.

Uniformity in *external profession*, and *ceremonial observance* has been accomplished ; yet this is a consideration so insignificant and uninteresting to all true Christians, especially when harmony in the all-momentous doctrine and practice of Christianity is wanting, that it is scarcely worthy of being mentioned. In one view, however, this act did produce, and still produces, real effects. It undermined the spiritual and sacred rights of the clergy, by disallowing them, to the full extent of its influence, the free approbation, the unbiassed practice, and the unlimited propagation of religion, in any way not conformable to its dictation and threatened judgments ; and so deprived them of their dearest natural rights—the unrestricted use and improvement of their intellectual powers. As there cannot possibly exist two contradictory rights, destructive of each other ; a right on the part of the subjects to think and decide for themselves on all religious subjects ; and a right on the part of the legislature to prescribe and enforce, by heavy penalties, the religion of the state on all the people of the land : so the conformists to this penal statute, as well as the nonconformists, were reduced to this alternative—they must necessarily surrender the exercise of their souls on all those points enforced by this act, or refuse obedience on those points to the commanding power of the state.

From this detail of facts, the reader will clearly perceive, that the act of uniformity was a legislative restriction on the propagation of Christianity, and on the public worship of God ; the narrow boundaries of which no subject in the land was suffered to pass, without incurring tremendous temporal penalties. These oppressive restrictions have been in active operation upwards of a century and a half, and must continue in operation upon all churchmen, damping their zeal, and cramping their exertions, until the eventful day when the intolerant statute shall be abolished. All the clergy in England, obeying the laws of their own church, still feel themselves disabled from preaching the Gospel, and from promoting the blessing of public worship, in any places, which have not received episcopal consecration.

This unnatural system of restriction was originally devised and imposed by the oppressive usurpations of the papal see ; and at the reformation, when king Henry, king Edward, and queen Elizabeth renounced all allegiance and subjection to his holiness, they retained this worst part of the Romish policy—the power of restricting and governing Christianity. The same intolerant and unrighteous policy was adopted at the restoration ; when, by the act of uniformity, a tremendous embargo was laid on religion and the best interests of men. This cruel law, unable to reform the vicious, was employed to inflict punishment upon men for their religious and conscientious scruples, and, accordingly, multitudes of persons were severely punished by it, whose religion was their only crime. While every species of debauchery was countenanced and encouraged at court, religion was deemed the only thing worthy of being insulted, oppressed, and persecuted. So long, therefore, as this act shall remain unrepealed, notwithstanding all attempts to palliate its enormity, it must be considered as subversive of men's rights and liberties to embrace and promote the religion of their own choice, and as depriving the church of England of that charity which hopeth all things, stamping upon her the indelible mark of inflicting persecution upon the members of her own communion.

SECTION III.

Other Legislative proceedings injurious to Freedom of Worship.

THE sufferings of multitudes of conscientious Christians awakened the tenderest sympathy in every liberal mind. Several attempts were made by some of the leading courtiers, to procure a relaxation of existing rigours ; but the temper of the house of commons was totally inimical to every idea of moderation. The corporation act, the statute against the quakers, and the act of uniformity were deemed insufficient to the protection of the church, and to the total extirpation of those who could not measure their faith and religion by legislative enactments. Notwithstanding the intolerance and cruelties of these penal statutes, and the distressing inhumanities already inflicted by protestants upon their fellow-protestants, the dominant cour-

tiers contrived to inflict upon them numerous *additional* penalties. These proceedings, prominently exhibited on our ecclesiastical records, were equally repugnant to the doctrine and spirit of Christianity, as they were to the principles of religious freedom; a circumstantial account of which, ought to be preserved as an instructive lesson to future generations.

The first of these memorable statutes, only two years after those now enumerated, was the "Conventicle Act," devised for the extirpation of all public worship not within the walls of the church. The scrupulous ministers, who could not with a good conscience retain their stations in the church, on the terms and conditions of the act of uniformity, were encouraged and supported by many of their friends; but this new statute was intended to annihilate either their religion or their separation, being enforced by the terrific penalties of imprisonment, banishment, and death.

The preamble to this unchristian statute sets forth, as is usual in such cases, that the nonconformists, under pretence of tender consciences, had at their meetings contrived insurrections; and then recognises and declares the 35th of Eliz. to be still in full force, which condemns all persons refusing to attend the public worship appointed by the state, to banishment, and, in case of return, to death without benefit of clergy. It then enacted as follows:

"That if any person above the age of sixteen years, after the first of July, 1664, shall be present at any assembly, conventicle, or meeting, under colour or pretence of any exercise of religion, in other manner than is allowed by the liturgy or practice of the church of England, there being five or more persons than the household; then it shall and may be lawful for any two justices of the peace, and they are hereby required and enjoined upon the proof made to them, either by the confession of the party, or the oath of witness, or notorious evidence of the fact, to make record of such offence and offences, which record shall to all intents and purposes be taken in law to be a full and perfect conviction of every such offender: thereupon the said justices shall commit every such offender so convicted, to jail, there to remain for a space of time not exceeding three months, or pay a sum of money not exceeding *five* pounds;—for the *second* offence he shall be impris-

soned *six* months, or pay *ten* pounds ;—and for the *third* offence, every such offender shall be transported to any of his majesty's foreign plantations for *seven* years, excepting to Virginia and New England, or pay the sum of *one hundred* pounds ; and in case such offender shall return or make his escape from such transportation, every such person shall *suffer death* as in the case of felony, without benefit of clergy, and shall forfeit *all his goods and chattels for ever*.

“ Be it further enacted, for the better preventing of the mischiefs arising from such seditious and tumultuous meetings under pretence of religious worship, that the lieutenants, or deputy lieutenants, or any commissioned officers of the militia, or any other of his majesty's forces, with such troops of horse or foot ; also the sheriffs and justices of peace, and other magistrates and ministers of justice, or any of them, within any of the counties of England or Wales, when they shall receive information of any such unlawful meetings or conventicles, are hereby required and enjoined to repair to the place, and to dissolve or prevent all such unlawful meetings, and take into custody all such persons as they shall think fit, and proceed against them according to law for such offences.

“ And be it further enacted, that every person who shall willingly suffer any such conventicle, meeting or unlawful assembly to be held in his house, outhouse, barn, yard, backside, woods, or grounds, shall incur the same penalties and forfeitures as any other offender against this act, and be proceeded against in all points, in the same manner as any other offender against this act.

“ And as to a certain sect called quakers, who not only offend in the matters provided against by this act, but also refuse to take any judicial oath when they are by law required, every such case of refusal and every such offence, shall hereby incur the aforesaid judgment and punishment of transportation, in such manner as is appointed by this act for other offences.

“ Provided always, and be it further enacted, that if any peer of this realm shall offend against this act, he shall pay *ten pounds* for the first offence, and *twenty* pounds for the *second* offence, to be levied upon his goods and chattels by warrant from two justices of the peace ; and that every peer for

the *third* and every subsequent offence against the tenour of this act, shall be tried by the peers of the realm.”*

Bishop Kennet had openly declared, as noticed in the former section, that the world had reason to admire the moderation of the act of uniformity, and that the people had no cause to complain of the least imposition; but this the right reverend father could not affirm of the barbarous conventicle act. This law, conformable to its nature and design, was a terrible scourge to the common people, as well as to ministers; who, on the one hand, peaceably and conscientiously withdrew from the worship appointed by the state, and, on the other, scrupulously resolved to worship God according to the light of holy Scripture and the convictions of their consciences. They were incessantly exposed to rude soldiers, with civil and military officers; in constant danger of being dragged to prison; and, without the trial of a jury, the birthright of Englishmen, they had no other prospect than transportation to the uncultivated shores of America. It would sicken the heart of every pious Christian to hear the protracted tale of abuses and sufferings inflicted upon the most pious Christians, for the extraordinary crime of serving and worshipping God contrary to the traditions and impositions of men. For this marvellous crime the ravages and forfeitures by this act were almost immense; the jails were filled with pious prisoners, where multitudes died; and others were transported as convicts across the wide Atlantic. To avoid as much as possible these extremities, they frequently held their assemblies at midnight, in the fields, woods, and most private places; notwithstanding all these precautions, they were often disturbed and dragged to prison: while others, with their families, emigrated to foreign countries.

All people, says bishop Burnet, were amazed at this severity. As the principal ecclesiastics have always been the ring-leaders in such abominations, which is strikingly manifest from the most approved historical records; so the bishops of Scotland now took encouragement, and resolved to copy after their brethren in England. An act was, therefore, made in the north, almost in the same terms as that in the south, upon the passing of which, the enemies of persecution discovered their

* Sewel, vol. ii. p. 125—126.

opposition; but the zealous patrons of intolerance carried it with a great majority.*

This, it is said, was a stormy time; the clouds had been long gathering, and now the tempest became violent. The foregoing act was contrary to the fundamental laws of England, and to common justice; and my author adds: It brake down the banks anciently fixed for the defence and security of the lives, liberties, and properties of Englishmen, by the trial of juries: instead of which it directed and authorized justices of the peace, even privately, out of sessions, to convict, fine, and, by their warrants, distrain offenders against it, directly contrary to Magna Charta.

By this act, the informers, who swore to their own advantage, being tempted by one third of the fines, were often concealed, driving on an underhand private trade; so that men were often convicted and fined without having any knowledge of it, till the officers came and took away their goods: nor even then could they tell by whose evidence they were convicted. What could be more opposite to common justice? which requires, that every man should be openly charged, and have his accusers face to face: that he may both answer for himself before convicted, and object to the evidence produced against him.

The bishops having obtained this barbarous statute, united with many of the conformist clergy and others, equally officious as themselves, and encouraged all who would turn informers, preferring to ecclesiastical offices those who were most favourable to their designs. They commissioned their spies and gave them instructions to thrust themselves into the assemblies, recommending them to use the deepest dissimulation, till they had obtained a full account of the number of meetings in each county, when they were held, and by whom attended, that they might cast their nets to advantage.† The quakers were very great sufferers by these inhumanities; upon which Isaac Pennington, one of the friends, being a prisoner for the testimony of a good conscience, wrote to the king and parliament, dissuading them from the mischievous work of persecution, when he addressed them with much good sense as follows:

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 204.

† Crosby, vol. ii. p. 236.

“ You may be apt to think, that I write these things for my own sake, and for the sake of my friends and companions in the truth of God, that we might escape the sufferings and severity which we are likely to undergo from you, and not chiefly for your sakes, lest you should bring the wrath of God upon your souls and bodies : to prevent this mistake, I shall add what follows. This, indeed, is not the intent of my heart. For I have long expected, and do still expect, this cup of outward affliction and persecution from you, and my heart is quiet and satisfied therein, knowing that the Lord will bring out of it glory to his name, and good to us : but I am sure it is not good for you to afflict us for that which the Lord requireth of us, and wherein he accepteth us ; and you will find it the bitterest work that ever you performed, and, in the end, will wish that the Lord had never given you this day of prosperity, rather than he should suffer you to abuse it.

“ Were it not from love to you, and out of pity from what will certainly befall you, if you go on in this course, I could say in the joy of my heart, and in a sense of the good-will of God to us, who suffereth these things to come to pass ; go on, try it out with the Spirit of the Lord ; come forth with your laws, and prison, and spoiling of our goods, and banishment, and death, if the Lord please ; and see if you can carry it. We come not against you in our own wills, or in any enmity against your persons or government, or in any stubbornness or refractoriness of spirit ; but with the lamb-like nature which the Lord our God hath begotten in us, by which we are taught and enabled, both to do his will, and to suffer for his sake. And if we cannot thus overcome you, even in patience of spirit, and in love to you ; and if the Lord our God please not to appear for us, we are content to be overcome by you : so the will of the Lord be done.

“ Ought laws made by man, in equity to extend any farther, than there is power in man to obey ? Is it not cruel to require obedience in such cases, wherein the party hath not a capacity of obeying ? In things concerning the worship of God, wherein a man is limited by God himself both as to what worship he shall perform, and what worship he shall abstain from, he is not here left at liberty to obey what laws shall be made to the contrary by man.”*

* Sewel, vol. ii. p. 175—179.

While the sword of persecution was passing through the land, the divine judgment scourged the nation by the dreadful visitation of the plague. This terrible judgment swept away, from London alone, about one hundred thousand souls, causing most of the remaining inhabitants to flee from the city, and nearly destroying the commercial interest of the country. The court and parliament, on this awful occasion, removed to Oxford; where the house of commons kept up "very high their ill humour against the nonconformists." Most of the conformist clergy in London having fled from the dangerous contagion, and many of the churches being in consequence shut up, when the remaining inhabitants discovered a disposition more than ordinary for the bread of eternal life, some of the nonconformists, upon this, ventured into the empty pulpits, and preached the word apparently with great success. In many places, says my author, they began to preach openly, not without reflecting on the sins of the court, and on the ill usage they had themselves received; and he adds, that indeed the ill life of the king, and the viciousness of the whole court, presented a very melancholy prospect.*

The intrepidity and benevolence of these scrupulous ministers were represented in a very odious light at Oxford, where the parliament was now sitting; and, instead of diminishing their burdens, they exceedingly increased the weight of their sufferings. The united calamities of war and pestilence, with the present persecutions, which at this time afflicted the nation, made no favourable impression on their minds, so as to incline them to a better temper towards their suffering fellow-protestants. Instead of being humbled before God, or mollified in their deportment; instead of exercising sympathy in the general distress, or attempting to reform the dissolute manners of the age, as if neither war, pestilence, dissipation, nor any symptoms of divine displeasure, were calamities of equal magnitude with that of nonconformity, they proceeded to enact a fresh penal law, usually called "The Oxford five-mile Act," which received the royal assent October 31, 1665.

The preamble to this act, recognised as usual the existence of schism and rebellion; and, to provide against these evils, it

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 218, 225.

declared, “ That divers parsons and others in holy orders, not having subscribed according to the act of uniformity, have taken upon them to preach in unlawful assemblies, and to instil the poisonous principles of schism and rebellion in the hearts of his majesty’s subjects, to the great danger of the church and kingdom. Be it therefore enacted, that all such nonconformist ministers shall take the following oath:—‘ I, A. B. do swear that it is not lawful, upon any pretence whatsoever, to take up arms against the king; and that I do abhor that traitorous position of taking up arms by his authority against his person, or against those that are commissioned by him, in pursuance of such commissions; and that I will not at any time endeavour *any alteration* of government in *church or state*.’—And all such nonconformist ministers shall not after the 24th of March, unless in passing the road, come within *five miles* of any city, town corporate, or borough, that sends burgesses to parliament, or within five miles of any parish, town, or place, wherein they have, since the act of oblivion, been parson, vicar, or lecturer, or where they have preached in any conventicle, on any pretence whatsoever, before they have subscribed the above-said oath before the justices of peace at the quarter sessions for the county in open court; upon forfeiture for every such offence of *forty* pounds, one third to the king, one third to the poor, and one third to him that shall sue for it. And it is further enacted, that such as shall refuse the oath aforesaid shall be incapable of teaching any *public* or *private schools*, or of taking any boarders or tablers to be taught or instructed, under the penalty of *forty* pounds, to be distributed as above. Any two justices of peace, upon oath made before them of any offence committed against this act, are empowered to commit the offender to prison for *six months* without bail or mainprise.”*

This savage law met with great opposition in the house of lords, particularly on account of its enforcing so unreasonable and unnatural an oath. The earl of Southampton, lord Wharton, lord Ashley, bishop Earl, and others, spoke vehemently against it; the first of whom declared, not only that he could not take the barbarous oath himself, but that “ no

* Gough, vol. ii. p. 118.

honest man could take it.”* Nevertheless the madness of the times, and the great power and influence of the court bishops prevailed against all reason and humanity. The chief promoters of this act, by whose superior influence it was carried, were the lord chancellor Clarendon, archbishop Sheldon, and bishop Ward, with “all that were the secret favourers of popery.”†

The oath required by this statute to be taken by all the nonconformist ministers, supposed what was not generally allowed, even that every good subject and good Christian was bound in conscience to believe what was contained in the oath, otherwise it was manifestly absurd to impose it upon them. There is great difference between enjoining any particular practice upon subjects, and obliging part of them to swear it is founded in religion and conscience, while the rest of the subjects are exempt, and may believe it or disbelieve it. The commons being aware of the force of so pressing an objection, prepared a bill to oblige all the subjects to take this ridiculous oath; but the bill only by two or three voices, was rejected. This was a public exposure of the unreasonableness and injustice of the oath, at least in the opinion of the two houses; because if it had been founded in reason and justice to impose it on a part, it would certainly have been equally or more reasonable and just to have imposed it on all; but, since it was intended to crush and exterminate only one particular class of society, its sage contrivers disallowed its extent to any others.

To require all the nonconformist ministers, and even all school-masters, to swear, not only that it was unlawful, in any case whatever, to take arms against one part of the legislative body, or those acting under its commission; but that they would not at *any time* promote *any alteration* in the government either of *church* or *state*, was certainly without a parallel, and was equally subversive of justice, and contrary to common sense. It must be acknowledged, that instead of men binding themselves from such endeavours by oaths, it is the indispensable duty of all good subjects, a duty they owe to God and to society, and which the English constitution recognises, to promote to the utmost of their power, by the use of every peace-

* Life of Baxter, part iii. p. 3.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 225.

able means, the alteration and improvement both of church and state, in all cases when it is overwhelmed with corruption and oppression. Without, therefore, noticing the foolish and severe temporal penalties to enforce this odious oath, the measure was manifestly unconstitutional, and a flagrant violation of the civil, as well as religious rights of the subject. It subverted the rights of Englishmen, with the duties they owed to the constitution and to society, and was a direct attack upon *Magna Charta*, the great bulwark of the nation. While such measures were adopted by the government, no man could be secure of his person, his property, or the claims of conscience: thus England had a fair prospect of returning to its former barbarism.

This law has been much applauded by partial and interested historians; but, says a writer who lived in those times, “while God was consuming the people by these judgments,” meaning the plague, “and the nonconformists were labouring to save men’s souls, the parliament, which sat at Oxford, was busy in devising an act of confinement, to make the case of the silenced ministers incomparably harder than it was before, by putting them to a certain oath, which, if they refused, they must not come within five miles of any city, corporation, or place where they had preached. So little did the sense of God’s terrible judgments, the necessities of many hundred thousands of ignorant souls, the groans of the poor people, or the fear of the great and final reckoning, affect the hearts of the prelatists, or stop them in their way. By this act, the case of the ministers was so hard, that many thought themselves necessitated to break it; not only by the necessity of their office, but by a natural impossibility of keeping it, unless they should murder themselves and their families. As to a moral necessity, since they durst not be so sacrilegious as to desert their sacred office wholly, to which they were consecrated, which would be worse than Ananias and Sapphira; so they could hardly exercise any part of their office, if they obeyed this act.”*

By this act many excellent ministers were great sufferers. Some indeed, by the favourable interpretation of the magis-

* *Life of Baxter*, part iii. p. 3.

trate, took the oath ; but most of them conscientiously objected, for which they were severely harassed and persecuted. They suffered themselves to be driven from their own habitations, and to be torn from their relations and friends, with all visible prospect of support, rather than sacrifice the peace of their consciences. Those who had property of their own, retired to remote and obscure villages, and to such places as were more than five miles from any corporation or any place where they had preached : but in many counties it was difficult to find such places of retirement. Great numbers were thus buried in obscurity, while others who had neither property nor friends to support them, still continued preaching as well as they could, until they were cast into prison, concluding it more eligible to perish in a jail than to starve out of one : especially when by this means they obtained some occasional relief from their hearers, with some hopes that their wives and children might be supported after their death. Many who could not sacrifice their duty to God and their beloved people, and who lay concealed in distant places from their flocks, rode thirty or forty miles to preach to them in the night, retiring before the dawn of day. These sufferers remained uniformly steadfast to their principles, while the church, by these measures, gained neither reputation nor accession of members. Although these severe proceedings reduced many ministers, with their families, to the necessity of living on “ brown rye-bread and water ;” scarcely one was cast into prison for debt, the good providence of God having afforded them wonderful relief under all their extremities.

The ministers and their people could not help reflecting on the cruelty of this statute, which, treating them as infected members of the commonwealth, whose approach was equally to be dreaded as the first appearance of the plague, deprived them not only of the common blessings of society in general, but of the blessings of their respective religious societies, to which they were bound by the strongest ties of gratitude and affection, and to which they had a similar claim as to their existence. These proceedings were unnatural, inhuman, and tyrannical in the extreme. Yet, so little are mankind actuated by the golden rule or holy example of their divine Master, by whose precepts they pretend to be directed, whose name they

assume, and for whose faith they so zealously contend, that the men who adopted these oppressive measures would have considered the slightest relaxation of their intolerance, as little less than the abandonment of the Gospel of peace ! Such is the blind infatuation of persecution.

Whilst this intolerance was exercised in England, the episcopal council of Scotland discovered a similar disposition to promote animosity and schism in the north. On pretence of some trivial impropriety in the conduct of one Smith, a presbyterian minister, a proclamation was published this year, commanding all the silenced presbyterian ministers to remove themselves and their families, within forty days, from the places where they had been ministers, and not reside within twenty miles of the same, or within six miles of Edinburgh, or any cathedral church, nor within three miles of any royal borough, nor should there be more than two of them in the same parish, on pain of incurring the penalties of the law against *movers of sedition* !! I see no difference, my author adds, between sentencing men to death, and putting them out of a capacity to live, unless the latter punishment affords the more exquisite vengeance : but this rigour will appear the more extreme, when it is recollected that the presbyterians constituted the body of the Scotch nation.*

Notwithstanding all these intolerant proceedings, the king and his privy-council are said to have been *always disposed* to countenance and protect the persecuted nonconformists ; and his majesty is exceedingly applauded for having, in clemency and good-nature, if not in judgment and conscience, afforded very generous and faithful protection to the French protestants settled in this country, even in time of war as well as peace with the French nation.† If the court was always thus disposed to protect the English protestants without distinction ; why was not that protection actually afforded ? How would the court have been satisfied, if the subjects had only been *disposed* to obey the civil laws of their country, refusing actual obedience ? Were these pious and persecuted English protestants the only subjects in the land, who were unworthy of his majesty's protection, especially since he extended so large a

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 641.

† Kennet, vol. iii. p. 259.

share of clemency and good-nature towards foreign protestants, even in time of war? If his majesty and the council had been so much disposed to protect these honourable confessors of truth, why did the court bring forwards, and why did his majesty give his royal assent to, all these disgraceful edicts of oppression and persecution?

The iniquities of the nation were not sufficiently punished by war, pestilence, and persecution, but a fourth terrible judgment was in reserve;—it pleased God the next year to permit the city of London to be destroyed by the great conflagration. The origin of this destructive fire was generally charged upon the catholics; and this was a prevailing opinion in the parliament. While the judgments of God were thus inflicted upon the country, the two houses were at length inclined to exercise “a little reason” towards the nonconformists; and they began “to see, what they might have seen long before, if their zeal and revenge had not blinded them, that the more their breaches were widened, the weaker they grew; and the more they opposed each other, the less they attended to the growth of popery,” which now greatly alarmed the nation.*

The storm of persecution seemed a little to abate, especially in the city of London, to which other causes besides the alarming growth of popery contributed. The expensive Dutch war, the depopulating pestilence, the destruction of the city by fire, and particularly the fall of lord chancellor Clarendon, and the promotion of the duke of Buckingham to the office of prime minister, were the principal occasions of rest unto the churches. Clarendon had been a chief instigator and promoter of the foregoing severities; but was now cast off by his own friends, and banished from the country, while those whom he had persecuted were the most moderate towards him, and many of them his decided friends. The duke of Buckingham, who succeeded him, was their great patron, and the firm advocate of religious freedom. Under the wing of his administration the nonconformists in London found protection; and, for some time, the people went openly to their meetings without fear. This greatly encouraged the ministers in the country, who imitated their example in most parts of England; and, to

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 613.

the honour of their ministry, "crowds of the most religious people were their auditors."*

The house of commons, still influenced by the pernicious principles of the late chancellor, petitioned the king to issue his royal proclamation, for enforcing the laws against conventicles, and for preserving the peace of the kingdom, against the unlawful assemblies of Roman catholics and protestant nonconformists. His majesty, therefore, in compliance with this petition, and in expectation of a liberal supply of money for so doing,† issued his proclamation, That upon consideration of the late petition of the commons, and upon information that divers persons in several parts of the realm, abusing the clemency which had been used towards persons not conforming to the worship and government established in the church of England, even while it was under consideration to find out a way for the better union of his protestant subjects; have of late frequently and openly, in great numbers, and to the great disturbance of the peace, held unlawful assemblies and conventicles; therefore his majesty hath been pleased to declare, that he will by no means permit such notorious contempt of himself and his laws to go unpunished; but requires, charges, and commands all his officers to be circumspect and vigilant in their several jurisdictions, to put in execution all the laws now in force against unlawful conventicles, strictly commanding them to preserve the peace of the kingdom.‡

The learned prelates, who certainly ought to have known better, were equally zealous as the commons in recommending the suppression of religious assemblies, and the execution of the penal laws. The celebrated lord chief justice Hale having undertaken to draw up a bill for the comprehension of the presbyterians within the pale of the church, and the lord keeper Bridgman having engaged to support it to the utmost of his power, the bishops immediately took the alarm, and archbishop Sheldon addressed a circular letter to his suffragans, commanding them to make strict inquiry concerning the conventicles in their respective dioceses. His grace was not ignorant which was the best way to go to work: he was sure of success. Having obtained all the necessary information for his purpose,

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 271.

† Ibid.

‡ Echard, p. 854.

he exaggerated every circumstance to the king ; and, having obtained the ascendancy over his majesty's easy temper, his uncatholic effort greatly contributed towards procuring the above proclamation.*

The parliament seconded the zealous efforts of the bishops, first, by an address of thanks to the king for his proclamation, then by a vote of prohibition against any member bringing forwards the proposed bill in favour of nonconformists, and by appointing a committee to make inquiry into their conduct. Their committee reported, that divers conventicles and seditious assemblies had been held in the vicinity of the parliament-house, so as to insult the government, and endanger the public tranquillity ; therefore the house immediately declared its resolution to adhere to the king in support of the government both of church and state, against all its adversaries.

The reproachful terms, “ seditious conventicles,” “ unlawful assemblies,” and others of similar import, were extremely convenient to render the best of men odious to those in power, and, during this reign, were constantly in the mouths of the dominant party, to bring down the penal retribution upon their heads. What then was, in fact, the true meaning and import of this language ? These seditious conventicles and unlawful assemblies, let it be recollected, were religious meetings, convened for the sole purpose of worshipping God, and partaking of the holy ordinances of Jesus Christ, according to the New Testament ; and they were stigmatized *unlawful* and *seditious*, not because they were actually the nurseries of sedition, or the occasion of any public disturbances, but because they encouraged a conscientious separation from the communion and worship of the established church. How could these pious and scrupulous people have acted otherwise ? They could not for the world make the declarations, take the oaths, and become in all things conformable to the religion provided by the state. Placed in these circumstances, with the dreadful judgments of the penal laws hanging over their heads, what must they do ? Must they sacrifice their judgments and consciences on the altar of uniformity, or renounce religion and the public worship of God altogether ? They patiently and

* Gough, vol. ii. p. 294.

quietly submitted to the rigorous punishment of existing intolerance; but this was insufficient to satisfy their oppressive adversaries. They must not only endure all the cruelties of persecution; but, to render them still more obnoxious, their characters must be misrepresented, and their names made odious to the world. Nevertheless, on account of their sufferings in the cause of religious emancipation, their characters and their names will be transmitted with unimpeachable honour to posterity.

The foregoing measures were considered as the prelude of fresh persecution; and the dreaded storm presently arrived. The former act against conventicles having expired, and fresh, but *groundless* alarms being raised, another and more severe act passed the two houses, and obtained the royal assent, April 11, 1670, to the following effect:

“ That if any person of the age of sixteen years or upwards, shall be present at any assembly, conventicle or meeting, under colour or pretence of any exercise of religion, in any other manner than according to the liturgy and practice of the church of England, at which there shall be five persons or more present besides those of the household, in such cases the offender shall pay the sum of *five* shillings, for the first offence, and *ten* shillings for the second. And every person taking upon him to preach or teach in any such meetings, shall forfeit *twenty* pounds for the first, and *forty* pounds for the second offence. And those who knowingly suffer such conventicles in their houses, barns or yards, shall forfeit *twenty* pounds.

“ Any justice of peace, on the oath of two witnesses, or any other sufficient proof, may record the offence under his hand and seal, which record shall be taken in law for a full and perfect conviction, and shall be certified at the next quarter sessions. The above fines may be levied by distress and sale of the offender's goods and chattels, and, in case of the poverty of such offender, upon the goods and chattels of any other person or persons who shall be convicted of having been present at the said conventicle, at the discretion of the justice of peace; so that the sum be levied on any one person, in case of the poverty of others, do not amount to more than *ten* pounds for any one meeting: The constables and others are to levy the same by warrant from the justice; and it is to be divided, one third to

the use of the king, one third to the poor, and one third to the informer or his assistants, regard being had to their diligence and industry in discovering, dispersing, and punishing the said conventicles.

“ And it is further enacted, that the justice or justices of the peace, constable and other officers, may by warrant, with what aid and assistance they may think necessary, break open and enter into any house or place where they shall be informed of any conventicle, and take the persons assembled into custody. But if any constable, churchwarden or overseer of the poor shall refuse to give information when he knows of such conventicle, he shall forfeit *five* pounds, and if any justice refuse to do his duty, he shall forfeit *one hundred* pounds.

“ And be it further enacted, that all the clauses in this act shall be construed *most largely and beneficially for the suppressing of conventicles, and for the justification and encouragement of all persons to be employed in the execution thereof*: and no record, warrant, or mittimus shall be reversed or made void by reason of any default in the form ; and if a person fly from one county or corporation to another, his goods and chattels shall be seized wherever they are found. If the party offending be a wife cohabiting with her husband, the fine shall be levied on the goods and chattels of the husband, provided the prosecution be within three months. The parties aggrieved may appeal to the quarter sessions if the fine amount to ten pounds, but to no other court, and if cast to pay *treble* damages.”*

Many historians, conscious of these enormities, have endeavoured to palliate the severity of this act, by alleging that it was occasioned by the existing state politics, and not by the church. This representation is certainly correct ; for by the existing state politics, not only this, but all the other penal laws of the church were enacted ; and this proves with the evidence of indubitable fact, that the church of England is, to all intents and purposes, a political institution, founded from first to last on the public acts of the political body. Unless therefore the church of England, and the civil legislature are identically the same, the church has no “ power to decree rites and

* Gough, vol. ii. p. 295—298.

ceremonies," and has no "authority in controversies of faith;" for she cannot enact a single law for her own government, but is wholly beholden to the civil legislature for every law by which all her concerns are regulated. This, like the other laws of the church, was a legislative enactment; and though historians affirm, that it was intended for political purposes, and not to promote religion, that will not be considered as any palliation for its enormity. Persecution, in every age, has attempted to hide its deformity under the cloak of political prudence, or some other base subterfuge.

Although the penal laws were enacted by the legislative body, the clergy, as appears from authority that will never be questioned, had no inconsiderable share of influence. From the beginning, their interest was not wanting to procure these laws, nor to promote the rigorous execution of them. They esteemed this act as a considerable acquisition in their favour; upon which archbishop Sheldon addressed a circular letter to all the bishops of his province, commanding them, "to take notice of all nonconformists, holders, frequenters, maintainers, and abettors of conventicles, especially of the preachers or teachers in them, and of the places where they are held; ever keeping a more watchful eye over the cities and great towns, from whence the mischief is for the most part derived unto the lesser villages and hamlets. And wheresoever they find such wilful offenders, that then with a hearty affection to the worship of God, the honour of the king and his laws, and the peace of the church and kingdom, they do address themselves to the civil magistrate, justices, and others concerned, imploring their help and assistance for preventing and suppressing the same, according to the late act in that behalf made and set forth. What the success will be," his lordship adds, "we must leave to Almighty God; yet I have this confidence under God, that if we do our parts now *seriously*, by God's help, and the assistance of the civil power, considering the abundant care and provision the act contains for *our advantage*, we shall in a few months see a great alteration in the distractions of these times."

The bishop of Peterborough having commanded the ecclesiastical officers to put this law in execution, declared publicly, "It hath done its business against all fanatics, except the qua-

kers ; but when the parliament sits again, a stronger law will be made, not only to take away their lands and goods, but also to sell them for bondslaves !!"* Who can acquit the church of a share in this persecution, when its prelates were so intemperately warm and active in it, and, not satiated with all these severities, were contriving still greater oppressions ?

Bishop Ward, bishop Gunning, and others were zealous abettors of this act ; but the learned and pious bishop Wilkins opposed it to the uttermost. When it was debated in the upper house, this excellent prelate argued long against it ; and when the king requested him not to oppose it, he replied, " that he thought it an ill thing both in conscience and policy ; therefore, both as an Englishman and a bishop, he was bound to oppose it." And when his majesty desired him not to come to the house while it was pending, he answered ; " that,* by the law and constitution of England, and by his majesty's favour, he had a right to debate and vote : and he was neither afraid nor ashamed to own his opinion in this matter, and to act pursuant to it."†

This unmerciful act destroyed the bulwark of the Englishman's liberty, property, and life—the *trial by jury* ; and authorized a single justice out of sessions to convict, fine, and, by warrant, to levy it upon the offender, contrary to *Magna Charta*. This iniquitous law punished the innocent in the place of the guilty, by subjecting the husband to a penalty for the conduct of the wife, and the goods of any person present at these obnoxious religious assemblies, to fines which other offenders were unable to discharge. The method of conviction was clandestine ; for persons were often convicted and fined without the least knowledge of it, till the officers came and took away their goods. Its natural tendency was to influence magistrates to partiality in judgment, and to reverse the magisterial qualification according to Scripture, to the *encouragement* of evil-doers, and the *punishment* of those who did well. By one remarkable clause, the cruel and malignant spirit by which it was devised, was strikingly manifested. If any dispute should arise about the construction of the act, the justices of the peace were directed, contrary to the

* Gough, vol. ii. p. 303.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 272.

universal practice of the English courts of judicature in the interpretation of penal statutes, to explain the doubt in the sense least favourable to the delinquent. Thus was the sound provision of English law, which, even in cases of murder, and other heinous crimes, requires the judge to give all the benefit of doubt to the prisoner—expressly prohibited by the supreme legislature from being extended to those, who were charged with the enormous crime of worshipping God according to the dictates of their consciences ! Such, indeed, was the violence with which the legislature now conducted its proceedings, that, had not the providence of God afterwards interfered, and the national politics undergone an unexpected revolution, another persecution still more dreadful was painfully apprehended.

Another clause which was particularly objectionable to many of the magistrates was the heavy fine which it inflicted on all justices of the peace, who could not execute the barbarous statute, upon every information given them. This caused many, who refused to be the instruments of such cruelties, to retire from the bench, and sit there no more.*

Notwithstanding these obnoxious features in the act, the clergy listened to the archbishop's mandate before recited, and gave encouragement to vile informers. They used their utmost efforts to obtain and encourage the most profligate wretches to turn informers ; and to get such persons into parochial offices as would be most obsequious to their directions, and most prompt to put this odious law into rigorous execution. In some parts very early care was taken by persons not of the lowest rank, to make choice of persons not improperly qualified, “ men of acute parts, close countenances, pliant tempers, and deep dissimulation,” and send them forth as spies among the nonconformists, with instructions to thrust themselves into all societies ; to conform to any profession ; and transform themselves from one religious profession to another, as occasion might require : in a word, they were commanded to become all things to all men, not that they might gain some, but that they might ruin as many as possible. These proceedings seemed to be the unhappy consequences of the archbishop's instructions.†

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 270.

† Gough, vol. ii. p. 304, 305.

While the great charter of England was torn in pieces, and the most infamous characters were thus hired to accuse the pious confessors of truth, multitudes of perjuries were committed ; convictions made without jury, or any hearing of the persons accused ; penalties were inflicted ; goods rifled ; estates seized ; houses broken up ; and families disturbed and cast into prison, if only a malicious person would give information of a meeting for the worship of God. Notwithstanding all these painful occurrences, a learned prelate affirms, that the laws imposed *moderate penalties*, that the two houses of parliament were firm in the execution of those laws, and that the bishops and clergy were sincerely zealous in the same cause.* To read the affecting details of inhumanity and cruelty inflicted upon the various denominations of pious Christians, when their religion was their only crime, would turn pale the countenance of any man possessed of the common sympathies of human nature ; and to give a full account of all the particulars would fill a volume of no ordinary size, a few specimens of which are referred to in the margin.†

Burnet says, the informers were encouraged, and every where at work. The behaviour of the quakers was particular, for they seemed to be very courageous. After the act came out, they assembled for the worship of God as they had done before ; and, in the prospect of being seized, they refused to flee from danger, but went cheerfully to prison. There they remained till dismissed ; for they would neither petition for their liberty, nor pay the fines set upon them by the act, nor the jailer's fees, calling them the wages of unrighteousness. When released from prison, they refused to disown their former practice, or be ashamed of the worship of God : but, in imitation of Daniel, they resolved to observe it as publicly as ever. Some called this obstinacy ; but others firmness in the principles of Christian liberty.‡

The quakers, however, considered this uniform steadfastness as an essential part of their allegiance and fidelity to Jesus Christ. As this had been their care and practice from the beginning, they recommended, “ that an open testimony for the

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 286. † Neal, vol. iv. p. 446—454.—Crosby, vol. ii. p. 245—263.—Gough, vol. ii. p. 305—432. ‡ Burnet, vol. i. p. 271.

Lord should be borne, and a public standard for truth and righteousness upheld, in the power and spirit of God, by their open and known meetings, against the spirit of persecution, that in all ages hath sought to lay waste God's heritage, and that all friends, gathered in the name of Jesus, keep up these public testimonies in their respective places; and not decline or forsake their public assemblies, because of times of suffering, as worldly, fearful and politic professors have done: for such practices are not consistent with the nobility of the truth, and therefore not to be owned in the church of Christ."*

The last persecuting law in this reign was the "Test Act;" and, as this act still continues to disgrace the statute-book of this protestant country, it will be proper to give a particular account of its origin and operation. In consequence of the increase of popery, the parliament first introduced a bill for disabling all catholics from holding any office under government; also requiring all persons in public trust to receive the sacrament according to the church of England, and to present an attested certificate, with sufficient witnesses, to chancery, or the county sessions; and there to make an open declaration renouncing transubstantiation in full and positive terms. This act related to all persons already in offices of trust; and, having passed the two houses, and obtained the royal assent, it cut off at once all catholics from the posts of honour and of profit. The duke of York, who was general of the army, and the lord treasurer Clifford, resigned their places.†

All parties now became opposed to popery, except those at the head of the government by whom it was sanctioned and encouraged; and the nonconformists were willing to endure the severity of the penal laws, till a sufficient bulwark could be erected against this monster of iniquity. Notwithstanding the persecuting spirit which had been so predominant in the house of commons, they introduced a bill in favour of the protestant nonconformists, which either for want of time, or unanimity, was dropped, says Burnet, after the second reading; but, according to Kennet, it passed the commons, and was lost in the lords. The prudent, conciliating behaviour of the nonconformists, so effectually softened the spirit of the church party,

* Extracts, p. 80.

† Kennet, vol. iii. p. 294.

that no more votes or bills were offered against them, "even in that angry parliament which had formerly been so severe against them."*

The change of the ministry, and of the court measures, were favourable circumstances, but they continued only for a season. The government having adopted the test mentioned above, which concerned those only who occupied public offices, now contemplated a *general* test, with a view to shut out for ever all dissenters from all civil offices. The debates in the two houses were warm and protracted. In the upper house the measure was defended by lord Danby, lord Finch, and several of the bishops; who declared, that some method ought to be adopted to discriminate good subjects from bad ones. "It was not," said they, "to make a parliament perpetual; yet that was a less evil, than to run the hazard of a bad election, especially when jealousies and fears had spread through the nation. A good constitution was to be preserved by all prudent methods. No man was to be pressed to take the test: but as they who were unwilling to come into such an engagement, ought to have the modesty to be contented with the favour and connivance of the government; so, if that did not teach them good manners, it might be fit to use severer methods."

This bill met with great opposition from the temporal lords, many of whom were firm advocates of a free toleration. They maintained, that there ought to be no religious tests, beyond the oath of allegiance, in the elections to parliament; and, since this was the great privilege of Englishmen, to do any thing to deprive them of their votes in elections, would be an attempt to disinherit them of the principal part of their birth-right. They considered all tests in public assemblies as dangerous, and contrary to public liberty. They showed that the peace of society was best secured by good laws, and good government; and that oaths or tests afforded no security. While the scrupulous might be fettered by them, the bulk of the community would boldly take any test, and as boldly break it, of which the late times afforded sufficient proof. The matter of the test was, in their opinion, very doubtful. To affirm that

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 348.

it was a traitorous position to consider the king's person and power as distinct, was not true, and admitted of certain exceptions. Nor could it be reasonable to bind men against alterations, seeing every new law was an alteration. It was not easy to define how far the power of making alterations might go, and where it ought to stop. These things, they thought, should be left at large. As they were opposed to all parliamentary tests; so they were particularly against the measure now proposed.

Some of the peers evinced uncommon zeal and fidelity on this memorable occasion; and showed the great inconvenience of condemning all resistance upon any pretence whatsoever. There might be cases, they said, in which no man would say, it was not lawful to resist. If the king should at any time make us a province, and tributary to France, or subdue the nation by a French army, or surrender the nation to the papal yoke, must we be bound in such cases tamely to submit? The court, nevertheless, carried every question in favour of the test, though not without a formidable opposition, and a protestation from the contrary party, upon every step that was carried; but, through events altogether unexpected, the discussion was interrupted, and the king prorogued the parliament.*

The test was afterwards revived, when the disgraceful act passed the two houses, and obtained the royal assent. It required, "that every person who shall be admitted into any office, civil or military, or shall receive any pay, salary, fee, or wages, by reason of any patent or grant from his majesty, his heirs or successors, or by authority derived from him or them, shall take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy in open court, and shall also receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper, according to the usage of the church of England, within three months after his or their admittance to such employment, in some public church, upon some Lord's day, immediately after divine service. And every such person shall also make and subscribe this declaration following:—*I, A. B. do declare, that I do believe there is not any transubstantiation in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, or in the elements of the*

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 373, 383—385.

bread and wine, at or after the consecration thereof by any person whatsoever.'”*

If any person refused to take the oaths and the Lord's supper as prescribed in this act, he was and still is adjudged, *ipso facto*, disabled from holding any of the above offices; and if any person should execute any of the said offices, without qualifying according to this act, “and being thereof lawfully convicted, in any of the king's courts at Westminster, or at the assizes, he shall from henceforth be disabled from suing or using any action, bill, plaint, or information in course of law, or from prosecuting any suit in any court of equity, or being guardian of any child, or executor of any person, or capable of any legacy or deed of gift, or to bear any office, within England, Wales, or Berwick upon Tweed, and shall forfeit the sum of *five hundred pounds*!”

This act was intended as a bulwark to secure the protestant religion, against the dangers of popery; and, similar to the other penal statutes, it laid the subjects under obligation that they would never assemble to treat of any matter civil or *ecclesiastical* without the king's permission, or ever attempt to promote any alteration of the government in *church* or state; all of which they were required to swear according to the literal sense of the words. The bishops displayed their great zeal in promoting this act, which they considered as an eternal barrier against presbyterians, as well as catholics. All milder measures were rejected with much scorn; and the nonconformists were represented as more dangerous than the papists. Bishop Paterson said, “that the protestant and popish religions were in his mind so equally stated, that a few grains of loyalty, in which the protestants had the better of the papists, turned the balance.”†

The publication of the test created universal murmuring among the best of the clergy; and many of them thought it extremely hard that men should be constrained to swear to a system composed of so many propositions, some of which were at least exceedingly doubtful. They were highly offended at the great extent of the royal prerogative, particularly upon the point of supremacy, by which the king expelled the bi-

* Burn, vol. iii. p. 17.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 516.

shops at pleasure. It was sufficiently hard to bear this: but it was intolerable to oblige men by oath to maintain it. As the law now stood, the king, it is added, might by a proclamation put down even episcopacy itself; and by this oath the clergy were bound to defend his conduct. All synods and other religious assemblies were to be held only by his permission; so that all the visible ways of preserving religion now depended wholly on his majesty's pleasure. Thus they saw on how slender a tenure they held their most sacred rights "under a popish king;" and being tied to all this by oath seemed very hard.*

Whilst these degrading infringements were exercised upon the clergy, and the act was principally intended as a national bulwark against popery, its operations were, and still are, directed equally against protestant nonconformists, as against Roman catholics. The better part of the nation found it a grievous encroachment on their civil rights, and a shameful prostitution of one of the most sacred institutions in the New Testament; while, for upwards of a hundred years, it has proved the occasion of innumerable perjuries and profanations. The perversion of the Lord's supper into a test for civil offices, betrayed a very short sighted policy by causing divisions and discords among protestants, and by weakening the power of the government, as well as the strength of the nation; and by this policy the clergy were compelled to administer the holy sacrament to atheists, blasphemers, and open profligates, as an essential qualification for a civil or military post. The tendency of this prostitution plainly is, by the law of the land, to make void the institution of Jesus Christ. By his gracious appointment, the participation was to serve purely as the participants' testimony of their faith in him, and love to him, "Do this in remembrance of me:" but by this law it is made a qualification, or test, absolutely necessary to the attainment of certain lucrative offices, civil or military. To render this testimony, if possible, perfectly unequivocal, all such persons must have a certificate from the minister of their having received the sacrament, to present to their superiors on every occasion when required. "For my part," our author adds,

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 518.

“ I do not see how the divine commandment, in what regards its spirit, power, and use, could be more effectually abrogated by statute, than by thus retaining the form, the letter, the body of the precept, and, at the same time, totally altering its purpose, object, and intention.

“ Men have been long in discovering, and even yet seem scarcely to have discovered, that true religion is of too delicate a nature to be compelled, by the coarse implements of human authority and worldly sanctions. Let the law of the land restrain vice and injustice of every kind, as ruinous to the peace and order of society, for this is its proper province; but let it not tamper with religion, by attempting to enforce its exercises and duties. These, unless they be free-will offerings, are nothing; they are worse. By such an unnatural alliance, and ill-judged aid, hypocrisy and superstition may be greatly promoted, but genuine piety never fails to suffer.”*

This act, therefore, evinced a presumptuous encroachment on that which was evidently instituted by Jesus Christ, and was particularly calculated to mislead the communicants, by a manifest prostitution of one of the most solemn services that man can offer to God. On these grounds the measure is justly reprehensible, and ought to be abolished; as ought every other encroachment, especially when, as in the case before us, such encroachment tends to wound charity, and to promote division and strife among Christians. It was a manifest infatuation to suppose that the test could be any security to the Christian religion.†

Thus, the reader is furnished with a copious abstract of those legislative proceedings which were evidently destructive to religious freedom, and the rights of Christian churches. The rigorous execution of these laws presents a melancholy prospect in the ecclesiastical annals of king Charles the Second. By these reiterated, intolerant measures, the pious non-conformist ministers were separated from their beloved congregations, their maintenance, their homes and their families; while their people were reduced to great distress and misery, or shut up in prison among thieves and robbers. Multitudes fled from their native shores, and sought refuge in New En-

* Cambell's Lectures, vol. i. p. 73.

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 621.

gland and other foreign countries. Had they been guilty of treason or rebellion, their case would have been inexcusable ; but, since they were punished only for disapproving the religion of the state, and for claiming the religion of their own choice, that punishment can deserve no better name than *persecution*.

From the complexion of the foregoing laws, a traveller from a foreign country, untutored in the prejudices of English protestantism, would naturally have supposed, that the persons whom they intended to proscribe were criminals of no ordinary cast, and unfit to live in a state of civil society. He could not have imagined that it was merely for a difference of opinion as to the proper mode of worshipping the Deity, that these painful sufferings were inflicted. Enlightened reason, as well as Christianity, shudders at the arrogance of the men, who could inflict penalties so severe upon their fellow-protestants, on account of points in religion that involved so much uncertainty, or were, in their own nature, perfectly indifferent and harmless.

A question of no inconsiderable moment arises here : How shall we ascertain the true spirit and character of the ecclesiastical establishment?—Not from the evangelical or anti-evangelical doctrines preached by her venerable clergy—not from the Christian moderation and amiable character of her pious members—not from her articles of faith, her Book of Common-prayer, or any of her external forms of worship—not from the moderation of her learned prelates, or those acts of toleration which have, in later times, been granted in favour of nonconformists. The unequivocal spirit and character of the ecclesiastical establishment is openly portrayed and publicly proclaimed, by those laws now enumerated, which secure her existence, and which gave authoritative directions, as well as afforded sure defence, to all her clergy, and all her concerns.

It ought to be recollected to the honour of the two houses of parliament, that, after the foregoing enactments, they discovered their error, and attempted in part to retrace their steps. The parliamentary uniformity they found too severe, and even impracticable, when they endeavoured to introduce and establish a system of greater moderation. A bill was brought into the commons, for the comprehension of nonconformists within

the pale of the church, which passed the two houses, as will afterwards be noticed. The commons about the same time, passed two votes; "That the laws made against recusants ought not to be executed against any but those of the church of Rome: and that the laws against protestant dissenters ought not to be executed." These motions served only to awaken the baser passions of the opposite party, and to widen the difference between the court and the parliament, without serving in the least the cause of religious freedom. The two houses with grief beheld the rapid strides of popery and arbitrary power; therefore, to stem their progress, it was no bad policy to oppose the persecution of dissenters, and bring them into nearer union and operation against the common enemy; as will be more particularly noticed in the following section.

The two houses, however, were successful in one very important case, closely connected with religious emancipation. The dreadful statute for burning heretics was, to the disgrace of Britain, still in force; while the imminent dangers of popery, and the advances of the popish interest at court, awakened the attention and policy of the two houses; when, not till the year 1677, they obtained a legal repeal of the cruel act.* The alarming increase of popery, with the prospect of a popish head to the protestant church of England, impelled them to adopt this policy; with a view to prevent the return of popery and popish persecution.

SECTION IV.

Arbitrary Power ruinous to the Rights of Christians.

SEVERAL conspicuous features in the character of king Charles have been already mentioned. It will be necessary to take notice of some others, together with their influence on religious freedom. His majesty was very far from betraying the savage dispositions, or extreme petulance, of some of his predecessors; but was mild and affable towards all who approached him. He discovered a continued predilection in favour of

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 361.

popery and popish counsels, and laboured incessantly to extend the prerogative, not only beyond the boundaries of law, but even to a direct abrogation of the statutes of the realm. These shameful encroachments were frequently exemplified in conducting the affairs of the church, in flagrant subversion of those laws to which he had given his royal assent. By this arrogant assumption of power, the religion of all the people in the land was placed, or attempted to be placed, under the direction and control of one man; and, by endeavouring to set aside the power and authority of two branches of the legislature, his majesty wished to have the religion of all his subjects entirely at his own disposal.

Upon the first publication of the act of uniformity, the king discovered to the parliament how agreeable it would be to him to have the sole management of that act; but, to this, the two houses answered by declaring their unwillingness to comply with his royal desire. Both before and after the passing of that act, the king continued to feed the expectations of his nonconformist subjects; and, since it was natural to desire ease, so long as there remained any prospect of obtaining it, they presented their addresses to the throne and the council, for deliverance from the pains and penalties which this act denounced. His majesty, therefore, by advice of his privy-council, published a royal declaration to all his loving subjects, dated December 26, 1662, about four months after that act took effect; in which, after reciting the words of his declaration from Breda, relating to the guarantee of liberty to tender consciences, and his readiness to consent to an act of parliament for that purpose, he added as follows:

“As all these things are fresh in our memory; so are we still firm in the resolution of performing them to the full. But it must not be wondered at, since that parliament to which those promises were made, never thought fit to offer us an act for that purpose, that we being so zealous as we are, and by the grace of God shall be, for the *maintenance of the true protestant religion*, should give its establishment the precedence before matters of indulgence to dissenters from it; but that being done, we are glad to renew to all our subjects concerned in those promises of indulgence this assurance, that as to what concerns the penalties upon those, who, living peaceably, do

not conform to the church of England through scruple, or tenderness of misguided conscience, but modestly, and without scandal, perform their devotions in their own way, we shall make it our special care, as far as in us lies, without invading the freedom of parliament, to incline their wisdom at the next approaching sessions, to concur with us in making some act for that purpose, as may enable us to exercise with a more universal satisfaction, *that power of dispensing which we conceive to be inherent in us.*"

This declaration was, according to Burnet, the result of a council of papists convened at the earl of Bristol's house, when they entered into an oath of secrecy, and when the earl informed them, that now was the proper time for the introduction of their religion. The king had no doubt a share in the contrivance. The catholics rejoiced in their flattering prospects; while great numbers of protestants, clearly perceiving what was intended, received the declaration with a great degree of coolness.*

The parliament having in a few weeks assembled, the king thus addressed the two houses:—"To cure the distempers, and compose the different minds among us, I set forth my declaration of the 26th of December, in which you may see, I am willing to set bounds to the hopes of some, and to the fears of others; of which, when you shall have examined well the grounds, I doubt not that I shall have your concurrence. The truth is, I am in nature an enemy to all severity for religion and conscience how mistaken soever it be, when it extends to capital and sanguinary punishments, which I am told begun in popish times. Therefore, when I say this, I hope I shall not need to warn any here not to infer from thence, that I mean to favour popery. I must confess to you, there are many of that profession, who, having served my father and myself very well, may fairly hope for some part of that indulgence I would willingly afford to others who dissent from us: but let me explain myself, lest any mistake me herein, as I hear they did in my declaration. I am far from meaning by this, a toleration or qualifying them to hold any offices or places in the government; nay further, I desire some laws to be

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 193, 194.

made to hinder the growth and progress of their doctrines. I hope you have all so good an opinion of my zeal for the protestant religion, that I need not tell you, I will not yield to any therein, not to the bishops themselves, nor in my liking the uniformity of it as now established; which being the standard of our religion, must be kept pure and uncorrupted, free from all other mixtures. And if the dissenters will demean themselves peaceably and modestly under the government, I could heartily wish, that I had such power of indulgence, to use upon occasions, as might not needlessly force them out of the kingdom, or, staying here, give them cause to conspire against the peace of it.”*

In this speech from the throne, his majesty openly avowed his design of obtaining a legal power of indulgence, by which he might use or revoke the existing penal statutes as he should think fit. This exceedingly alarmed the house of commons; and having voted an address of thanks for his majesty’s resolution to maintain the act of uniformity, they signified their disapprobation of all indulgence, for which they assigned the following reasons:

“We have considered your majesty’s declaration from Breda, and are of opinion that your majesty ought not to be pressed any further with it; because it was not a *promise*, but only a gracious declaration of your majesty’s intentions to do what your parliament should advise you, and no such advice was ever given. They who pretend a right to that supposed promise, put the right into the hands of the representatives, whom they chose to serve for them in this parliament, who have passed the act of uniformity. If any shall presume to say, that a right to the benefit of this declaration still remains, it tends to dissolve the very bonds of government, and to suppose a disability in the whole legislature to make a law contrary to your majesty’s declaration. We have also considered the nature of the indulgence proposed, and are of opinion—That it will establish schism by law, and make the whole government of the church precarious, and its censures of no moment.—That it is unbecoming the gravity and wisdom of parliament, to pass a law in one session for uniformity, and in the

next session to pass another law to frustrate or weaken the execution of it, the reasons of uniformity continuing the same.—That it will expose your majesty to the restless importunity of every sect, and of every single person, who shall presume to dissent from the church of England.—That it will increase sects and sectaries, whose numbers will weaken the true protestant profession, and be troublesome to the government; that so at length they may arrive at a general toleration, and at last contend for an establishment which may end in popery.—That it is altogether without precedent, and will take away all means of convicting recusants, and be inconsistent with the proceedings of the laws of England.—That the indulgence proposed will not tend to the peace, but to the disturbance of the kingdom; therefore the pressing of the act of uniformity is the most probable means of producing a settled peace and obedience throughout the kingdom.”*

The king gave the commons hearty thanks for their address, and acknowledged that never was a prince so happy in a house of commons as he was; informing them, that their paper and reasons being long, he should take into consideration, and return them his message in reply. His majesty being unwilling to give up the power of indulgence, was particularly desirous it should have passed, that the scrupulous nonconformists might have been suffered to enjoy their liberty; but the parliament was extremely hostile to all indulgence, on the superficial grounds stated in their address.

Some historians have affirmed, that the king's clemency not only flattered the nonconformists with constant hopes of liberty and toleration, but also “hardened them in their *prejudices* against the church;” whereas, if they had lost all dependence on a court interest, and had found the king and his ministers firm in the execution of the act of uniformity, “most of them would no doubt at this juncture have conformed;” but whether his majesty did not exercise this clemency “to give the better protection and advantage to popery” and arbitrary power, is a question which they have left undetermined.† Their statement contains a large portion of misrepresentation, and stands opposed to almost innumerable facts portrayed

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 239.

† Ibid. p. 240.

throughout this reign. The learned prelate now cited has trod in the steps of his brethren, by resolving the principles of freedom into *prejudices* against the church, and by affirming that by the exercise of royal clemency the nonconformists were hardened in these evils: but it is certainly the most extraordinary when he suggests, that by the infliction of greater severity, most of them would no doubt have renounced their principles, and have conformed. He seems to have forgotten, the character of the persons, and that the conformity of honest men depends not upon their wills, but upon their understandings and consciences; and it is certainly very ungenerous to impeach the integrity of men, who underwent so long a train of severe trials avowedly to preserve their souls from prostitution.

In the following year, was revived the great question of liberty to the silenced ministers, when the court encouraged them to petition for a general toleration; also the question was under discussion, whether indulgence or a comprehension was most desirable? Many of the independents, as well as the presbyterians, were absurdly averse to the grant of religious toleration to catholics; yet those most distinguished for eminence were of the contrary opinion, and said—"You are blind, if you see not that the act of uniformity was made so rigorous, and the weight of conformity so much increased, that the number of ejected ministers might be so great, as to force them to be glad of a general toleration, which might take in the papists. If you think to stand it out, they will yet bring you to it in spite of you: they will increase your burdens, and lay you all in prisons, till you are glad to petition for such a toleration; and stand it out as long as you can, you will be forced to procure the papists' liberty; and the odium of this opposition will not lie on the bishops, but on you who are so much against it. The bishops will speak against it, and force you to beg it who are against it; and if you will not do it now, you stay only till the market rise, and your sufferings are made greater, then you will be glad to do it at a dearer rate."

The presbyterians, infatuated with their beloved covenant uniformity, declared, that it was against their covenant to promote popery and schism; therefore whatever they might suffer, they would not do it: nor would they contract that odium

with the people, nor attempt to betray them by deceiving them. If they should do it, they were assured they would be never the better for it. The toleration, they conceived, would be clogged with the renunciation of all obligations from the covenant, or some other particular conditions, to which they could not conform, but the papists would; and having petitioned for a general liberty, they would have the odium, and papists only the benefit. Nothing however was done.*

The king being highly offended with the behaviour of most of the bishops, took occasion to declare his offence at the council-table. Upon complaint of certain religious assemblies called conventicles, he signified, that the clergy were chiefly to be blamed for these disorders; for if they had lived well, gone about their parishes, and taken pains to convince the nonconformists, the nation might by that time have been well settled. But they thought of nothing, except how they might get good benefices, and keep good tables. I was struck, says Burnet, to hear a prince of his course of life so much disgusted at the ambition, covetousness, and scandals of the clergy. He said, "if the clergy had done their part, it had been an easy thing to run down the nonconformists: but they will do nothing, and will have me do every thing: and most of them do worse than if they did nothing."†

After the lapse of six years a treaty of comprehension was revived, under the patronage of many distinguished persons. The design was, by certain abatements, to comprehend part of the nonconformists within the pale of the church, and to secure a toleration of the rest. The lord keeper Bridgman, lord chief justice Hale, bishops Wilkins and Reynolds, and Drs. Tillotson, Stillingfleet, Burton, Bates, Manton, and Mr. Baxter, concurred in the design. A treaty being opened, his majesty's declaration from Breda was considered as the broad basis of agreement; but the generous project was presently blasted by the court prelates and those of their party, who immediately took the alarm, and exclaimed against it, as undermining and betraying the established church. They declared that it was unworthy of the church to treat with enemies; especially as there was no reason to conclude, that, having de-

* Baxter's Life, part ii. p. 433.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 258.

parted from her ostensible grounds, which would be a tacit acknowledgment of having erred, she would be no gainer by it, but would bring scorn and contempt upon herself. On the other hand it was forcibly urged, that the nonconformists could not legally assemble to offer any scheme in the name of their party; that their exceptions were sufficiently understood; that the project would probably reclaim many of them to the church; that yielding in some lesser matters would be no reproach, but an honour to the church; and that, how much soever she might be superior in power, as well as in argument, she would of her own accord, and for the sake of peace, yield a great deal in such matters. The fears of popery, and the progress of atheism, excited considerable alarm in the breasts of wise and good men; who thought, that every thing that could be done without sin, ought to be done towards healing these divisions.*

The lord chief justice Hale, undertook to draw up a bill for the purpose of a comprehension, and the lord keeper Bridgman engaged to support it in the parliament; yet by the superior power and influence of the bishops, the project completely failed, as related in a former section. The failure of this worthy design proved the occasion of much grief and regret to all the friends of true religion and Christian freedom. They were the firm advocates of peace, concord, and toleration, but which benefits were not permitted to be secured by law. The celebrated Dr. Owen said, “The desire of universal concord is continually upon my heart, and to express that desire on all occasions, I esteem one part of that profession of the Gospel to which I am called. Could I contribute any thing towards the accomplishment of so holy and so necessary a work, I should willingly spend myself, and be spent in it.”†

Notwithstanding the total failure of these liberal efforts, men of sound Christian principles did not give up all hope of accommodation, but still used their most vigorous endeavours to promote a friendly union of all parties. Among those who appeared zealous in this cause were bishop Morley, the lord treasurer Osborne, and the earl of Orrery; the last of whom requested Mr. Baxter to draw up suitable terms of union, the principal of which are here recited:

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 259.

† Baxter's Life, part iii. p. 63.

That no oath or promise should be required of ministers, but the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, with subscription to the doctrine and sacraments of the church of England, and a general declaration against sedition and rebellion. That, till the nonconformists could be better provided, they should have liberty to be schoolmasters, or assistants to incumbents, or deliver public lectures in the churches ; and that their meeting-houses should continue to be used as chapels. That liberty be granted to persons joining together for prayer, praising God, and repeating sermons, in their private houses without molestation. That no minister be obliged to read the apocryphal lessons, and that liberty be granted in the use of the public service. That parents have liberty to dedicate their own children to God in baptism, without being obliged to provide godfathers and godmothers. That no man be forced to receive the sacrament while he is unfit or averse, and that ministers be not forced to administer the sacrament to them. That ministers be not forced to publish excommunications or absolutions against their consciences, upon the decree of a lay chancellor. That the cross in baptism, kneeling at the sacrament, and the use of the surplice be left indifferent. That people living under ignorant or scandalous ministers may have liberty to join with those from whom they can derive greater profit, paying the incumbent his dues. That every ordained minister be allowed to exercise his ministry where he shall be lawfully called. That no excommunicated person, as such, be imprisoned or ruined. And that the greatest Christian lenity be exercised towards all conscientious persons ; so that the tolerable might be tolerated under laws of peace and safety.

These were certainly very honourable proposals, though far from recognising complete religious emancipation ; and had the government acted upon them, by the total annihilation of existing penal laws in religion, the storm of persecution would at once have abated, and the reputation of the government have been transmitted to posterity. Bishop Morley professedly entered into the liberal design ; but his professions were proved to be deceitful, by refusing to make the least alteration or abatement in the rigorous ecclesiastical demands. The object was considered as the native right of the subject, and beneficial to the nation, upon which a bill was drawn up

by certain learned members of the house of commons to abolish the oaths, subscriptions, and declarations, except the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, and subscription to the doctrine of the church of England. But the bishop, by his superior power, policy, or influence, opposed and thwarted the design.*

While these transactions took place in the south, his majesty's spiritual supremacy was fully recognised in the north, when the Scotch parliament passed an act, one clause of which was expressed in the following strong and comprehensive language:—"His majesty, with advice and consent of his estates in parliament, doth hereby enact and declare, that his majesty hath supreme authority and supremacy over all persons, and in all causes ecclesiastical within his kingdom; and that by virtue thereof, the ordering and disposal of the external government and policy of the church, doth properly belong to his majesty and his successors, as an inherent right to the crown: And that his majesty and his successors may settle and enact such constitutions, acts, and orders, concerning the administration of the external government of the church, and the persons employed in the same; and concerning all ecclesiastical meetings, and matters to be proposed and determined, as they in their royal wisdom shall think fit."†

In virtue of this act, those measures were pursued which alarmed the English bishops, who could find no rest till, by their petitions and persuasions, they were revoked by the king. They denied that the common people had any rights to lose; yet those of their own order were no sooner exposed to peril, than they sounded the alarm, and pushed their influence till permanent security was obtained. But the king was resolved to make himself absolute; and having adopted this resolution, his majesty easily saw, that the execution of it required an artful and cautious conduct, with such secret and imperceptible methods, as would not too clearly discover his intentions. He could not suppose, that because he desired to be absolute, the people of England would immediately give up their rights and liberties. Since it was necessary to lead them insensibly and by degrees, he wanted a secret council composed of few persons, in whom he might unreservedly confide, and whose

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 296.

† Collier, vol. ii. p. 895.

interest it was to accomplish this design. The ordinary council of twenty-one persons was not proper to conduct this affair; for, while some had a right to their places, as for instance the archbishop of Canterbury, it was very difficult to engage so many persons of the first rank in so extravagant a plot. To accomplish this object with greater caution, the king established a cabinet council of five persons only, viz. Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley, and Lauderdale. As the initials of these five names compose the word *cabal*, this secret council was hence denominated the CABAL.*

The king, from the day of his restoration, had been grasping at arbitrary power, and this was the powerful engine by which it was carried into effect. The project to render the king absolute, which required the aid of catholics and protestants, was begun by James I., vigorously pursued by Charles I., and, after an interruption of twenty years, was eagerly resumed by Charles II. This is the true basis of the principal events of this reign; without the proper consideration of which, it seems impossible to account for his majesty's conduct.†

The court now gave such broad intimations of its ill design, as well on religion, as on the civil constitution, that it was no longer a matter of jealousy: all was plain and open as in the light of day. In the king's presence the court-flatterers were incessantly magnifying absolute government, and reflecting on the insolence of the house of commons. The king said, that he did not wish to be like the Grand Seignior, with some mutes about him, and bags of bowstrings to strangle men; but he did not think he was a king, so long as a company of fellows were looking into all his actions, and examining his ministers, as well as his accounts. He reckoned, now that he had set the church party at such a distance from the dissenters, that it was impossible to make them join in opposition to his designs. He hoped the former would be always submissive; and he had the latter at mercy.‡

The most scandalous corruptions were now patronized and practised by the government. In the parliament every man's price was well known; and as a man rose in credit, he raised his price, and expected to be treated accordingly. The court

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 655.

† Ibid. p. 618.

‡ Burnet, vol. i. p. 345.

flatterers magnified the foreign governments, whose princes were absolute, and, to please their prince, said, "It is a very easy thing to shake off the restraints of law, if the king would set about it."*

The king having assumed this despotic power, did not long conceal his true character, but issued his second declaration of indulgence, setting aside the statutes of the realm. In this declaration, after asserting his high prerogative, and his firm attachment to the doctrine and government of the church, he adds as follows:

"We do declare our will and pleasure to be, that the execution of all manner of penal laws in matters ecclesiastical, against whatsoever sort of nonconformists or recusants, be *immediately suspended*; and *they are hereby suspended*. All judges, judges of assize, and gaol delivery, sheriffs, justices of the peace, mayors, bailiffs, and other officers whatsoever, whether ecclesiastical or civil, are to take notice of it, and pay due obedience thereunto. And that there may be no pretence for any of our subjects to continue their illegal meetings and conventicles, We do declare, that we shall from time to time *allow a sufficient number of places*, as they shall be desired, in all parts of this our kingdom, for the use of such as do not conform to the church of England, to meet and assemble, for their public worship and devotion; which places shall be open and free to all persons. But to prevent such disorders and inconveniences as may happen by this our indulgence, if not duly regulated, and that they may be the better protected by the civil magistrate; our express will and pleasure is, that none of our subjects do presume to meet in any place until such place be allowed, and the teacher of that congregation be approved by us."†

This is one of the most extraordinary documents to be found in the annals of Christendom; by which the king professedly revoked all the penal laws relating to religion and the church, and arrogantly assumed to himself the sole power of providing ministers and places of worship for all the protestant nonconformists in the kingdom! By this despotic and illegal measure, the public profession of their religion no longer

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 269.

† Kennet, vol. iii. p. 287.

depended on the will of the *whole* legislature, but one of the three branches, by its own act and deed, set aside the power and authority of the two others, and, as with the exercise of infallibility, dictated to the scrupulous nonconformists the principal things pertaining to their religion ! Thus, according to this strange edict, their ministers and their places of worship, with even the existence of the one or the other, were absolutely dependent on the sovereign pleasure of a despotic, popish monarch !!

What use then did the king make of this arrogant and tyrannical assumption of power ? In some cases he gave his royal orders in council for dislodging the congregations, and for pulling down to the very foundations the places in which they assembled ; which orders were executed by the military power, and with savage barbarity.* It was at the same time ordered by his majesty and council, that all the nonconformist places of worship within the cities of London and Westminster should be changed into tabernacles ; that the ministers who officiated in them should be expelled ; and that the places should be regularly supplied by conformist divines ! Public notice was, therefore, given on one day, of no less than eight different places, as particularly described by our author, which had hitherto been used as places of public worship by dissenters from the church of England, but were now “ by his majesty’s particular command in council appointed to be used every Lord’s day for celebrating divine worship and preaching the word of God, by approved orthodox ministers, to be appointed thereto by the right reverend father in God the lord bishop of London, to begin the next Lord’s day !”†

These odious transactions were not likely to do either the church or the king much credit ; they discovered the true spirit and character of king Charles and his indulgence ; and showed on the evidence of undoubted facts, that his government was converted into a plunderer of the property of his subjects. Thus, his majesty manifested his sincerity and his zeal in tyrannically controlling both the religion and the freehold of his people ; but when a great monarch descends to measures so paltry and dishonourable to satiate his own arbi-

* Gough, vol. ii. p. 345, 346.

† Bp. Kennet, vol. iii. p. 281, 282.

trary pleasure, he quits the dignity of his station, and becomes at once an object of terror and abhorrence.

King Charles's indulgence was to him an object of very signal importance. His sincerity and his zeal in maintaining it were not confined to conventicles, but were carried to the lords and commons in parliament. Not long after the publication of this pretended indulgence, the king having convened the two houses, delivered a speech to them, declaring, that he did not intend that this indulgence should be in any way prejudicial to the church, but that he would support it, and its rights in full power. Having made this open protestation, he said—"I shall take it very ill to receive contradiction in what I have done; and I will deal plainly with you, *I am resolved to stick to my declaration.*—I will conclude with this assurance to you, that I will preserve the *true reformed protestant religion, and the church*, as it is now established in this kingdom; and that *no man's property or liberty shall be invaded!!* I leave the rest to the chancellor."

The king having finished his speech, the chancellor addressed the two houses in a tone so remarkable, that his words ought to be recited as a useful lesson to mankind to the end of the world. "The king," said he, "hath spoken so fully, so excellently, and so like himself, that you are not to expect much from me. There is not a word in his speech that hath not its full weight; and I dare with assurance say, will have its effect with you.—His majesty has so fully vindicated his declaration, that no reasonable scruple can be made by any good man. He has sufficiently justified it by the time in which it was published, and the effects he hath had from it; and might have done it more from the agreeableness of it to his own natural disposition, which no good Englishman can wish different from what it is. He loves not blood, or rigorous severities; but where mild and gentle ways may be used by a wise prince, he is certain to chuse them. The church of England, and all good protestants, have *reason to rejoice in such a Head, and such a Defender.* His majesty doth declare his care and concern for the church, and will maintain it in all its rights and privileges, equally, if not beyond any of his predecessors. He was born and bred up in it; and his father died for it. We all know how great offers and temptations he resisted abroad, when he

was in his lowest condition ; and he thinks it the honour of his reign, that he hath been *the restorer of the church*. Which he will ever maintain, and hopes to leave to posterity in greater lustre, and upon surer grounds, than our ancestors ever witnessed : but his majesty is not convinced, that violent measures promote the interest of religion or of the church.”*

No intelligent reader can help beholding the glaring falsehoods here stated, and the gross artifice with which they are vented. This speech was spoken by a man who was “ the soul of the Cabal, and the master-builder ” of the scheme for promoting the arbitrary intentions of the king.† The earl of Shaftesbury, therefore, must have had a brow of brass to pronounce such a speech before so august an assembly. This was perhaps only for form’s sake, and the Cabal believed themselves so secure, that the parliament itself would not dare to notice their artifices : but they were greatly mistaken, and this presently appeared from the address which the house of commons presented to the king, declaring, that having taken into consideration his declaration of indulgence to dissenters, they found themselves bound in duty to inform his majesty, That penal laws in matters ecclesiastical could not be suspended but by act of parliament ; they therefore most humbly besought his majesty to give such directions, that no apprehensions or jealousies might remain in the hearts of his subjects.

The king answered this address, by saying, that he was very much troubled, that the declaration which he published for ends so necessary to the peace of the kingdom, especially in that juncture, should have proved the cause of discord, and have given occasion to question his power in matters ecclesiastical, which he found not done in the reigns of any of his ancestors. That he never had thoughts of using it otherwise than as it had been entrusted to him for the peace and establishment of the church of England, and the ease of all his subjects. Neither did he profess to suspend any laws wherein the properties, rights, or liberties of the subjects were concerned, nor to alter any thing in the established doctrine or discipline of the church of England : but his only design in this was, to take off the penalties inflicted by statutes upon dissenters,

* Rapin, vol. p. 665, 666.

† Echard, p. 890.

which he believed, when well considered, they would not wish executed according to the rigour of the law.

The royal answer was far from giving satisfaction to the commons ; who presently replied, that his answer was not sufficient to clear those apprehensions which might justly remain in the minds of the people, by his majesty's having claimed a power to suspend penal laws in religion, and which his majesty still seemed to assert as *belonging to the crown*, and *never questioned in any of the reigns of his ancestors* : wherein they humbly conceived his majesty had been much misinformed, since no such power had ever been claimed or exercised by any of his majesty's predecessors. If such power should be admitted, it might tend to interrupt the free course of the laws, and to alter the legislative power, which had always been acknowledged to reside in his majesty, and in his two houses of parliament. So, with unanimous consent, they became humble suitors to his majesty, that he would be pleased to give them a full and satisfactory answer to their address, and that his majesty would take such effectual order, that the proceedings in this matter, might not in future be drawn into consequence or example. The king replied to this address, " It is of consequence, and I will take it into consideration."*

The bishops and established clergy in general imbibed the spirit and followed the measures of the court, by the revival of passive obedience and nonresistance. Our author, a learned churchman, gives the following affecting account of this fact. About this time it was, that a certain set of men began a *second* time to adopt into our religion a *Mahometan principle*, under the names of passive obedience and nonresistance ; which since the time of the eastern impostor, who first broached it, has been the means of enslaving a great part of the world. These notions were now carried to so great a length, that it was considered as a crime against the state, for any one to regret the approaching fate of his country. Even the holy Scriptures themselves were made accessary to arbitrary power ; and the laws which were given to the Jews as they were a political state, were now introduced on every occasion to countenance the designs of the court : as if those laws which were intended

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 667, 668.

only to support the political government of the Jews, constituted the proper foundation of the Christian religion ; or that the constitution of England was founded upon the Jewish doctrine ; all of which was not much to the honour of those gentlemen who broached that notion. This was a time never to be forgotten, when to wish well to our country was a crime ; and when God himself was ranged on the side of our enemies, by those who pretended to expound his will. In some places a new kind of *funeral harangues* came into fashion ; when our *laws*, our *liberties*, our *parliaments*, and our *native rights* were to be buried : but instead of dropping a tear at their funeral, fulsome panegyrics were made upon the murderers of them, and curses denounced against those who would have retrieved them from destruction.*

The zeal of the clergy for the court designs were not merely the overflowings of joy at the king's restoration, which might so engage their attention as to prevent an early discovery of the wrong measures then adopted ; but when the mask was thrown off, and the king, having quarrelled with his two houses of parliament, discovered his resolution never to be encumbered with them any more, the clergy still distinguished themselves by showing their attachment to the principles and maxims of the court. The pulpits resounded with those doctrines of passive obedience and nonresistance, which had been espoused by the clergy in the reign of Charles I., but were now almost universally promulgated. The clergy seemed to make it their business to surrender to the king, all the liberties and privileges of the subjects, and to leave them only an unlimited obedience ; so that, according to the doctrines publicly delivered from the pulpits, no eastern monarch was more absolute than the king of England.†

One remarkable circumstance occurred, which reflects considerable light upon this subject. The king having arraigned the conduct of his two houses, and having accused them in many instances of undutiful behaviour, an order was passed in council at the motion of the archbishop of Canterbury, that the clergy should be made the heralds for publishing his majesty's reasons for dissolving his parliament, which they were

* Welwood, p. 125, 131.

† Rapin, vol. ii. p. 725.

required to read publicly in all the churches throughout England. Almost innumerable addresses were on this occasion presented to the king, congratulating him on the magnanimity of his conduct, and praising him for what he had done. The clergy struck up a higher note, with such zeal for the succession of the duke of York, as if a popish king had been a special blessing from heaven, and much to be desired by a protestant church. They also went to such lengths against the persecuted nonconformists, as if no enemies could have been more formidable; so that according to the learned prelate, in all their sermons popery was quite forgotten, and the force of their zeal was turned almost wholly against the dissenters; who were now by order from the court to be proceeded against according to law. A great change was also made in the commissions all over England; and none were left either on the bench, or in the militia, who did not with zeal go into the humour of the court. Such of the clergy as would not engage in these furious designs were discarded as the betrayers of the church, and as secret favourers of the dissenters. The truth is, the number of these was not great; for one observed right, that, according to the proverb in the Gospel, ‘Where the carcass is the eagles will be gathered together:’ “the scent of preferment will draw aspiring men after it.”*

No means whatever were unattempted to promote the endeared object of the court. The popish Cabal contrived and provided schemes, not only to impoverish and intimidate all opposers of the duke’s interest, but to encourage and promote all those clergy who would preach and write in defence of the favourite court doctrines. These odious doctrines were carried farther than at any former period; and the pulpit was the bar at which to plead against the liberty and property of the subject.†

The king directed his watchful eye to the two universities, and carefully corrected every dangerous innovation in those seats of literature and religion. He descended in his proceedings to the most minute particulars, and gave the reverend and venerable clergy those authoritative instructions, which could not fail to make a deep impression on their minds. He com-

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 501.

† Hist. of Stuarts, vol. ii. p. 668.

manded them, on pain of his displeasure, to deliver their sermons from *memory*, and *without book* ; as appears from the following instructions, sent by the duke of Monmouth, in his majesty's name, to the vicechancellor and others of the university of Cambridge :

“ Whereas, his majesty is informed, that the practice of reading sermons is generally taken up by the preachers before the university, and therefore continues even before himself ; his majesty has commanded me to signify to you his pleasure, that the said practice, which took its beginning from the disorders of the late times, be wholly laid aside ; and that the said preachers deliver their sermons, both in Latin and English, by memory, *without book* ; as being a way of preaching, which his majesty judges most agreeable to the *custom of the university heretofore*, and to the *nature of that holy exercise*. And that his majesty's commands in these premises may be duly regarded and observed, his further pleasure is, that the names of all such ecclesiastical persons, who shall continue the present *supine and slothful way of preaching*, be from time to time, signified to me, by the vicechancellor for the time being : on pain of his majesty's displeasure.”*

The dispensing power claimed by the king, was fully recognised on the north of the Tweed. By the great vigilance of the duke of Lauderdale lord high commissioner, this abuse of power was established by a law passed in the parliament of Scotland, declaring, “ That by virtue of the king's supremacy, the government of the church properly belongs to his majesty and his successors, as the inherent right of the crown ; and that he may enact such constitutions, acts and orders, concerning church administrations, persons, meetings and matters, as he in his royal wisdom shall think fit, any law, act or custom to the contrary notwithstanding.”

The king being invested with this remarkable power, by all the formality of an act of parliament, did not fail to claim and exercise this transcendent qualification in his government of Scotland. Having there a standing army, living upon free quarter, he constrained all descriptions of people to depose upon oath, their knowledge of the persons and worship of dis-

* Statute Book, p. 300.

senters, upon penalty of fining, imprisonment, banishment, transportation, and of being sold for slaves: imprisoning all ejected ministers, who preached out of their families, till they gave security of five thousand marks not to do the same again; every hearer being a tenant was bound in the sum of *twenty-five* pounds; and that those who preached in fields or houses should be punished with death, and five hundred marks should be given to any who could secure such persons dead or alive!!*

The former unwelcome reception of the English liturgy in Scotland, unfortunately failed to operate as a sufficient warning against the revival of an attempt at its introduction. The sword and the halter were again resorted to, as the best methods of establishing the authority of the bishops, and the use of the litany. These uncomely weapons produced the worst confusions. The spirits of the Scots were not easily broken. Persecution, always more calculated to extend than to diminish the influence of obnoxious opinions, had here to contend with those whose faith, after severe oppressions, had recently been completely triumphant. The singular crime of attending what was called field conventicles, or offering up their prayers and praises in the open air of heaven, after expulsion by armed soldiers from the churches, was punished with death! The refusal to answer questions put for the express purpose of criminating persons suspected, and their questioning the propriety of propagating the faith by such proceedings, were crimes sufficient to condemn the offender to the gibbet! From this barbarous punishment no sex, or age was exempted.

We are informed that if the persecution was cruel and furious before, it was now raging and insufferable, carried on with such madness and thirst of blood, that none of the Pagan persecutions in primitive times could in all respects go beyond it. They did not torment the body by the fire, the rack, and other instruments of torture; yet they used the dreadful engines of torture, the *boot* and the *thumbkin*: but they inflicted upon the poor persecuted protestants those torments which were more cruel than death, by driving them from their dwellings into mountains, and dens, and caves of the earth, attended with insupportable hunger and cold, in a climate the most inhospita-

ble, and in places the most destitute of sustenance of any in that part of the kingdom. Those who were eye-witnesses agree, that many thousands of people perished by these violent measures, in addition to those who lost their lives under the accusation of rebellion; and we are assured that no less than *eighteen thousand* persons suffered death in various ways, by this bloody persecution !*

Such barbarous outrages on humanity, committed under the profession of zeal for the honour of God, and for the advancement of Christianity, could only tend to inflame those passions which are most opposite to the principles of true piety and sound policy. The ill effects of these proceedings on the civil polity of the nation, on the state of religion, and on the temper and character of individuals, was too clearly demonstrated. On these persecutions no man can look back without feelings of horror and detestation. With these persecutions before our eyes, as exercised by the church and government of England, upon their brethren of the same faith north of the Tweed, we cannot hear from churchmen of the outrageous cruelties of the bigoted Mary, without gently reminding them of the advice of their divine Master : “ Cast the beam out of thine own eye, then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”†

These proceedings in the north awakened the house of commons in the south; when they presented a long address to the king, accusing Lauderdale of the introduction of arbitrary power, to the imminent danger of the two kingdoms, and humbly beseeching his majesty to remove him for ever from his person and council. The king did not think proper to comply with their request, and gave several reasons for his refusal, not at all satisfactory to the commons.‡

The encouragement and increase of popery was evident to all beholders; and that this was the specific object of the government, was too obvious to be disputed. This at length roused the attention and jealousy of the parliament, when the two houses, convinced of their former errors, saw clearly the necessity of a friendly coalition with the protestant noncon-

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. ii. p. 596.

† Brown’s Laws, p. 141.

‡ Rapin, vol. ii. p. 677.

formists, though the high church bishops were inflexibly determined against it. Placed as they were in these circumstances, the house of commons renounced their former intolerance, recommended mutual forbearance, endeavoured to promote a general union, and firmly resolved, that it was their opinion that the acts of parliament made in the reign of queen Elizabeth and king James, against popish recusants ought not to be extended against protestant dissenters; and that the prosecution of protestant dissenters upon the penal laws was, at that time, grievous to the subjects, a weakening of the protestant interest, an encouragement of popery, and dangerous to the peace of the kingdom.

The lords being of the same opinion as the commons, introduced a bill for the legal security of a larger portion of religious liberty, and for promoting a closer union among his majesty's protestant subjects. On this important occasion, one of the members, alluding to the penal laws, said—"What real love, friendship, or obedience can the church expect from such persons, as by the execution of such laws, may be forced to come to church? How can they be depended upon, or the church be strengthened by them? You may prevent their meetings, and force them either to come to church, or pay fines, or be imprisoned; but you cannot expect that their opinions or affections should be altered by such proceedings, without which the church cannot be strengthened. Hath the Oxford act, or that of the 35th of queen Elizabeth, or any other against the dissenters been executed in favour of the church? Are not the dissenters more numerous than ever? Is there any thing more visible, than that these laws have been made use of to serve the popish interest, or as engines of the state rather than for the church?"*

The duke of Buckingham, who was now detached from the court-interest, and who introduced the bill, defended the justice and importance of the measure as follows:

"My lords, there is a thing called *liberty*, which, whatsoever some men may think, is that which the people of England are fondest of; it is that which they will never part with, and that which his majesty in his speech hath promised to take par-

ticular care of. This, in my opinion, can never be done without an indulgence to all protestant dissenters. It is certainly an uneasy kind of life to any man, who hath either Christian charity, humanity, or good-nature, to see his fellow-subjects daily abused, divested of their liberty and birthrights, and miserably thrown out of their possessions and freeholds, *only because they cannot agree with others in some opinions and niceties of religion, to which their consciences will not give them leave to consent*, and which, even by the confession of those who would impose them, are no ways necessary to salvation.

“ Besides this, and all that may be said upon it, in order to the improvement of our trade, and the wealth and greatness of the nation, there is, methinks, in the notion of persecution a very gross mistake, both as to the point of government, and the point of religion. There is so as to the point of *government*, because it makes a man’s safety rest upon the wrong place, not upon the governors, or upon his living well towards the civil government, but upon his being transported with zeal for every opinion, that is held by those who have power in the church that is in fashion. This, I conceive, is a mistake in *religion*, because it is against the express doctrine and example of Jesus Christ. Nay, as to our protestant religion, there is something yet worse ; for we protestants maintain that none of those opinions about which Christians differ are infallible, and therefore in us it is somewhat inexcusable, that men should be deprived of their inheritance, and all certain conveniences and advantages of life, because they will not agree with us in our uncertain opinions of religion.”*

The duke having concluded his heroic speech, moved and obtained leave to bring in a bill to secure that liberty for which he had so powerfully pleaded ; the substance of which was—That ease be given to his majesty’s protestant subjects dissenting from the established church, who shall subscribe the doctrinal articles of the church of England, and shall take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy.—That the said protestant subjects be released from all pains and penalties for not coming to church.—That the clause in the late Act of Uniformity

* Gough, vol. ii. p. 413.

for declaring the Assent and Consent, be taken away.—That the said protestant subjects be released from all pains and penalties for meeting together for the observance of any religious exercise.—That every teacher shall first give notice of the place of his meeting to the quarter sessions; where in open court he shall make the subscription, and take the oaths aforesaid, and receive a certificate thereof, and all such proceedings shall remain on record.—That any such teacher may exercise until the next quarter sessions, and no longer, in case he shall not make the subscription and take the oaths before two of the neighbouring justices of the peace, and shall first give them notice of the place of his intended meeting, and take certificate thereof under the said justices' hands, a duplicate whereof they are to return into the next quarter sessions.—That the doors and passages of all houses and places where the said dissenters meet, shall be always open and free, during the time of religious exercise.—That if any dissenter refuse to take the churchwardens' oaths, he shall find another fit person, who is not a dissenter, to execute that office, and shall pay him for his pains.*

A legal statute containing all these particulars would have afforded almost inconceivable relief from the barbarities of the penal laws; yet it would have fallen far short of guaranteeing unrestricted religious liberty. This bill passed the two houses, and, on the day of prorogation, was presented with other bills for the royal assent; but the clerk of the crown, by the king's particular order, secretly withdrew the bill, and so it was lost. Thus, the generous attempt of the two houses completely failed, and the various unmerciful penal laws continued on the statute-book unrepealed. For these illegal proceedings, the king received the thanks of many of his subjects, accompanied by their petition that the barbarous acts might still be put in execution.† In compliance, therefore, with this petition, persecution was revived with great violence, and dreadful were the sufferings inflicted on pious and conscientious subjects. Under these painful circumstances, the silenced and oppressed ministers presented their humble petition to the king, in behalf of themselves and others, giving an affecting description of the inhumanities with which they were treated, after which they conclude as follows:

* Echard, p. 889.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 495, 501.

“ We consider it our duty to profess, that though we take not and digest not all subscriptions, declarations, and oaths, which are of late imposed, it is not from any principal of disloyalty. For we firmly hold that every soul must be subject to the higher powers, not only for wrath, but also for conscience’ sake; and that honour and obedience in things lawful, and patience under wrongful pressures, is our duty to our rulers. In short, we know not one word in Scripture, one canon of any general council, one confession of any Christian church on earth, which speaketh more for subjects’ submission and peaceable obedience to kings, than we do heartily acknowledge; and we believe that no vow or covenant of our own, can disengage us from any part of this obedience, or warrant us to rebel.

“ We would not have the king of Rome, (the pretended vicar of the King of kings) to be king over your majesty or your kingdom. The world’s experience loudly tells us that clergymen are fitter to be kept by the sword in peace and quietness, than to be trusted with the sword; and we would not have kings to be made their executors. We have no doubt that the controversies and contentions of the worldly, tyrannical, and self-conceited clergy, have been many hundred years more calamitous to the Christian world, than the most bloody wars. We are ourselves so far from desiring grandeur and dominion, that we would not be so much as the pastors of any without their voluntary consent; and we wish that the state of the clergy was such as neither starved nor straitened the diligent labourers, nor so much as tempted and invited ambitious worldly minds; so that those are usually the masters of the church, who are most likely to be enemies to the holy doctrine which condemneth them.

“ We long, we pray, we groan for the concord of the Christian world; and we are sure that whoever shall be the blessed and honoured instruments of that work, must do it by breaking the engines of discord, and making the primitive simplicity the terms of union: even a few plain, certain, necessary things, while the sword of the magistrate constraineth the turbulent to peace and mutual forbearance in the rest. We are not for cruelty to any. We greatly approve of your majesty’s aversion to persecution. But we believe it is the

learning, godliness, and concord of the ministry, to be publicly settled by your laws, which must be the principal means of preserving religion, loyalty, and peace; and therefore we deeply regret that we are rendered so unserviceable in that great affair, and that well-meaning men should so long misunderstand our cause, and judge, defame, and use us as if we were the hinderers of that happy agreement which our souls most earnestly desire, and would purchase at any lawful price. To conclude, the belief of the heavenly glory through Christ, kindling the love of God and man, teaching us to live soberly, godly, and righteously, and the government keeping all in peace upon these terms, is the religion and state that we desire.”*

This interesting document unfolds the true spirit and character of the party. It discovers much good sense and deep acquaintance with the subject; but is not a professed defence of religious toleration. Notwithstanding the amiable spirit of conciliation which it breathed, it does not seem to have produced any good effect. The press was now disgraced by many publications warmly recommending the execution of the penal laws against nonconformists. Bishop Barlow of Lincoln having published a very angry piece on this unworthy subject, the celebrated Mr. John Howe sent his lordship a friendly letter by post, addressing him as follows:

“ I humbly submit to your lordship’s consideration, whether there is no difference to be put between things essential to our religion, and things on the one hand confessedly indifferent, and on the other judged unlawful, but on both hands only accidental, though they who think them unlawful dare not allow themselves the liberty of sinning even in accidentals. If your lordship were the head to a numerous family of children and servants, among whom a very dutiful child took offence, not at the sort of food you have thought fit to provide, but at something in the sauce or method of cooking; and you try all the means which your paternal wisdom and severity can devise to overcome that aversion, but all in vain, would you finally famish the child, rather than yield to his inclination in so small a thing?

“ My lord, your lordship well knows the severity of some of those laws of which you press the execution, and being executed they must effect the utter ruin of those who observe them not, in their temporal circumstances ; and not that only, but their deprivation of the comfortable advantages appointed by our blessed Lord, for promoting their spiritual and eternal welfare. I am well persuaded from my own knowledge and experience, there are some not only of sincerity, but of eminent sanctity, who would sooner die at a stake, than kneel before the consecrated elements at the Lord's table. Would your lordship necessitate such to abolish the substance for the shadow ? What if there be considerable numbers of such in your lordship's vastly numerous flock ; will it be comfortable to you, when an account shall be demanded of your lordship by the Great Shepherd and bishop of souls, that you will only be able to say, ‘ Though, Lord, I did believe the provisions of thine house purchased for them, necessary and highly useful to their salvation, I drove them away as dogs and swine from thy table, and stirred up such other agents as I could influence against them, by whose means I reduced many of them to beggary, ruined many families, banished them into strange countries, where they might, for me, serve other gods ; and this not for disobeying any immediate ordinance or law of thine, but because through the fear of offending thee, they did not in every thing comport with my own appointments, or which I was directed to impose upon them ? ’ How would this practice agree with that apostolic precept, ‘ Him that is weak in the faith receive you, but not to doubtful disputations ? ’ I know not how your lordship would relieve yourself in this case, but by saying they were not weak, nor conscientious, but wilful and humoursome. But what shall be said of the subjoined expostulation, ‘ Why dost thou judge thy brother ? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother ? We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. ’ What if they have been conscientious, and of a very unblameable conversation in all things else ? What if they were better qualified for Christian communion in all other respects, than thousands you admitted ?

“ But we must understand, it seems, that all this rigour of your lordship proceeds from love, and that you are for destroying the dissenters, to mend their understandings, and be-

cause affliction begets knowledge. I hope, indeed, God will sanctify the affliction which you procure them, to blessed purposes: but from the purposes which your lordship seems to aim at, I wonder what you can expect. Can you by undoing men, change the judgment of their consciences? Or if they should tell you, ‘we do indeed in our consciences judge, that we shall greatly offend God by complying with your injunctions, but to save ourselves from ruin, we will do it;’ will this qualify them for your communion? If your lordship still think, that you have judged and advised well in this matter, you have the judgment of our sovereign, upon the experience of twelve years, lying against you. As to one of the laws you would have executed, you have the judgment of both houses of parliament against you; who passed a bill for taking it away, and to which perhaps you consented. If you have misjudged or acted against your judgment, I pray God to rectify your error by gentler methods, and less affliction than you have designed for your brethren; and I do not for all this doubt to meet you one day, where Luther and Zuinglius are well agreed.”*

Although this presents the character of bishop Barlow in rather an unfavourable light, the historian feels the utmost pleasure in being able to record an occurrence which reflected great honour on his temper and practice. It was through his lordship’s kind and unsolicited interference, that the well-known Bunyan was released from Bedford jail, where he had been confined no less than *twelve* years, for preaching the Gospel contrary to the penal laws. With so honourable an exception to the general spirit of the times, almost every thing was now done that could be done to establish the king’s absolute power. The latter part of his reign was one continued invasion of the rights of the people; and the nation seemed unwilling any more to withstand the overwhelming torrent. Notwithstanding his majesty’s great abilities and fitness for business, he appeared to be quite lulled asleep with the charms of his swelled prerogative.†

The king did not confine his arbitrary encroachments to religion, but committed open depredations on the *civil* constitution, and on the *civil* rights of his subjects. He dispensed

* Calamy’s *Howe*, p. 112. † *Rapin*, vol. ii. p. 733.—*Welwood*, p. 133.

with the laws relating to trade and navigation ; and declared, that the suspension of those laws should continue during his royal will and pleasure, and when he thought proper to make an alteration, he should give six months notice.* By multiplied despotic proceedings, the court was every where triumphant. The country was in a most oppressed and desperate condition. The duke of York, an open catholic, being highly complimented, seemed to overcome all difficulties. The court, not content with all its victories, resolved to be freed in future from the fear and cumber of parliaments.

These extravagant measures were not adopted without vigorous and powerful opposition in the two houses of parliament. In a celebrated speech, it was said—" The two great pillars of the government are parliaments and juries. It is this which gives us the title of *free-born Englishmen* ; for my notion of free-born Englishmen is this, that they are ruled by laws of their own making, and tried by men of the same condition. The two great and undoubted privileges of the people have been lately invaded by the judges that now sit at Westminster. They have espoused proclamations against law ; they have discountenanced and opposed several legal acts ; they have grasped the legislative power into their own hands : the parliament was considering that matter, but they in the interim made their private opinion to be law, superseding the judgment of this house. They have discharged juries on purpose to quell their presentments, and shelter great criminals from justice ; and when juries have presented their petitions for the sitting of the parliament, they have in disdain thrown them at their feet, telling them, they would be no messengers to carry such petitions ; and yet in a few days after, they would have encouraged all that would spit their venom at the constitution. They have served an ignorant and arbitrary faction."

On this occasion, another celebrated member said—" His majesty is enclosed by a sort of ministers, who endeavour to destroy the constitution, but I hope to move against them before we rise ; and though we have lost our bill, we have not lost our courage and hearts." On the demand of money for

Tangier, the renowned lord Russel said—"I'll never be for giving money to promote popery and a successor, a public enemy to the kingdom, and a slave to the pope. While he has eleven to seven in council, and sixty-four to twenty-one in the house of lords, we are not secure. If my own father had been of the sixty-four, I should have voted him an enemy to the king and kingdom; and if we cannot *live* protestants, I hope we shall *die* so."*

These vigorous oppositions against the illegal proceedings of the government were of no avail. The cities and boroughs of England were prevailed upon to demonstrate their loyalty, by the surrender of their charters, and accepting new ones modelled by the court. The king commanded the common council of the city of London to deliver up their charter, and even threatened them upon refusal with an order of judgment. They held out for a time, like a strong fortress in a conquered country, declaring that they were bound by their oaths to maintain the rights of their corporation, and that they could not surrender them without being guilty of perjury. Upon their refusal, judgment was entered; and the king seized their liberties. They were for a time, a city without charter, or common council; when the king nominated fresh magistrates. In the new charters sent to most of the corporations in the country the king reserved a power to himself, to turn out their magistrates at pleasure.†

When all these measures are collected together they indicate, on the part of the government, something like an extravagant fit of madness; but, according to the author last cited, "nothing was so unaccountable as the high strains to which the universities and most of the clergy were carried," while the nonconformists were exceedingly persecuted. The catholics set them to the work, and employed any clergymen to ruin them. This they did to promote their own advantage, and to render the clergy odious.‡

The university of Oxford now passed their famous decree, condemning formally, as impious and heretical propositions, every principle upon which the constitution of a free country

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. ii. p. 654. † Burnet, vol. i. p. 527, 568.

‡ Burnet, vol. i. p. 528.

could be founded. Nor was this learned body satisfied with stigmatizing those principles as contrary to the Holy Scriptures, to the decrees of councils, to the writings of the fathers, to the faith and profession of the primitive church, as destructive to the kingly government, the safety of his majesty's person, the public peace, the laws of nature, and the bonds of society; but after enumerating the several obnoxious propositions, one of which was, asserting a mutual compact between the king and his subjects; another, declaring the sovereignty of England to be in king, lords, and commons; a third, maintaining it to be unlawful for superiors to impose things unnecessary in the worship of God, with many others of the like nature, they solemnly decreed to be not only false and seditious, but impious, and that the books which contained them were fitted to lead men to atheism, rebellion, and the murder of princes!*

While the king and his servants the clergy, were tormenting and destroying English protestants, he, in imitation of several of his predecessors, afforded secure protection and full toleration to the French protestants, who, being driven from their homes by persecution, sought an asylum in this country; and his majesty was pleased to declare in council, "that he held himself obliged in *honour* and *conscience*, to comfort and support all such afflicted protestants, who, by reason of the rigours and severities against them on account of their religion, were forced to quit their native country, and shelter themselves under his majesty's royal protection, for the preservation and *free exercise* of their religion." The king was, therefore, pleased further to declare, "that he should grant to all such distressed protestants, who might come and reside in his dominions, letters of denization, under the great seal, without any charge whatever; and that he would likewise recommend it to his parliament, at their next meeting, to pass an act for the general naturalization of all such protestants."†

It is impossible to make an exact calculation of the sufferings endured, and the damages sustained on the score of religion, through the whole of this reign. It is affirmed upon a modest calculation, that the persecution within this period of

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 421.

† Echard, p. 1013.

five and twenty years, in England alone, procured the untimely death of *three thousand* nonconformists, and the ruin of *sixty thousand* families. Another authority represents the number of sufferers much greater, and affirms that nearly *eight thousand* perished in prison during this reign, merely for claiming the liberty of conscience, and of dissenting in some points from the religion incorporated with the state, for which they were able to give the most satisfactory reasons.*

The state of religion through this period was deplorable. We have already noticed his majesty's hypocrisy and debauchery, on authority that will never be questioned. The king, it is further observed, had no principles of religion, being wholly devoted to his pleasures; and from the court, the contagion spread among the common people, to a degree that is now inconceivable.† All ranks burst forth into the most profligate debaucheries; and the stage, under the patronage of the king, presented scenes which might make a harlot blush. The lewdest intrigues were the common business of the court. To drink the king's health to beastly excess was the sure test of loyalty and churchmanship. The excellent archbishop Leighton viewed the religion of the church of England, with very melancholy reflections, and felt exceedingly distressed with an expression then commonly used, that it was "the best constituted church in the world." He fully approved of its doctrine, worship, and the main pillars of its government; but as to the administration, both with respect to the ecclesiastical courts, and the pastoral care, he could not help considering it as one of the most corrupt churches he had ever witnessed. He considered the church of England during this reign, like a fair carcass without a spirit; without that zeal, that strictness of life, and all that labour of love, which ought ever to be the indispensable qualifications of the clergy.‡

Previous to the restoration there had been much of the appearance of religion, and no less attention to the ordinances of public worship. Whence then originated this change in the face of society, and this awful reverse in the religion and lives of the people? The military tactics by which the religion of

* Mather, b. iii. p. 4.—Delaune's Plea, Pref.

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 595.

‡ Burnet, vol. i. p. 589.

the state was upheld and established, and by which the repeated attempts were made to reduce the whole of the nation to one uniform order, most assuredly afforded no small assistance in effecting the melancholy alteration. A church founded on such maxims, and fighting men with such weapons, could never establish *religion*; it could only promote atheism, perfidy, and wickedness. The various penal statutes, and the uncatholic proceedings founded upon them, were outrages on the consciences of the people, who were treated as if they had no souls to think and judge for themselves, or as if religion was not a concern between God and every soul of man, but to be promoted at the point of the sword. The use of compulsive measures to promote religion, was treading in the footsteps of Mahomet; and attempts to force religion upon men, was attempting to do that which was absolutely impossible, tending to encourage hypocrisy, and to make religion hated. Christianity was never established by such methods. It appeals to the understanding and soul of every individual of the people; and whenever it is established, it is by sound persuasion, and on the ground of its own amiable attractions. To attempt the establishment of religion by the enactment of new laws and temporal penalties, was a dangerous libel, both on Christianity and its Author; and this was no doubt one powerful occasion of the irreligion and debauchery which continually increased through the reign of king Charles the Second. The religion of Jesus Christ could not grow in such a soil; but every thing noxious and hateful was carefully nourished, to the unspeakable disgrace of the country.

The subject demands our most attentive consideration. We here behold a monarch notorious for irreligion and licentiousness, issuing declarations, and giving his assent to acts of parliament, which purported to be for the promotion of true godliness; when, at the same moment, he had the presumption to interpose human authority between the consciences of men and the supreme Judge, imperiously dictating forms of worship and qualifications of Christians, repugnant to the views and feelings of many of his enlightened and pious subjects. To complete this iniquity, we here contemplate as the victims of grievous punishments, men whose morals were unimpeachable, whose peaceable demeanour was unquestionable, and

whose leading characteristics were good consciences and holy lives. This complication of iniquity and barbarity is not, indeed, to be ascribed to the personal character of the monarch; except so far as his indolence and want of feeling, together with his hereditary attachment to arbitrary power, led him into the counsels of those bigotted and designing partizans of an ecclesiastical institute, who sought to make religion the engine of secular power. The good people of those times reflecting upon the efforts of their fathers, once their glory, and beholding the result of all their conflicts in the scenes now presented, had their minds filled with sensations of the deepest regret, and feelings bordering on despondency.

The oppression exercised by king Charles was scarcely inferior to any of his ancestors. The king being, at length, pressed with pecuniary difficulties and painful prospects, the gaiety of his spirit forsook him, and he became silent and melancholy. With these unhappy prospects and anticipations, he finished his licentious life, on February 6, 1685, in the fifty-fifth year of his age, and the twenty-fifth of his reign, but not without strong suspicion of being poisoned.* Towards the close of his unpropitious reign, the king's "pretended zeal for the protestant religion and the church of England, when he was externally of the Roman communion, and internally of no religion at all, was a series of dissimulation which is indefensible."†

As the closing scene of king Charles's profligate life approached, three bishops attended him; who, severally, by very free and serious admonitions, endeavoured to alarm his conscience, and rouse him to penitential reflections: the king heard what they had to say, but answered not a word. He was six or seven times pressed to receive the sacrament; and a table, with the elements, was brought into the room, but he declined; and being urged to declare, "that he died in the communion of the church of England, he answered nothing." Bishop Ken then asked him, "if he desired absolution of his sins;" which the king not declining, behold! in this unimpressed, impenitent state of mind, the bishop, in the name of the Holy Trinity, pronounced upon him, "the forgiveness of

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 609.

† Warner, vol. ii. p. 627, 628.

all his sins." This, my author adds, "was thought to be a prostitution of the peace of the church;" soon after which, the king died, recommending his mistress and illegitimate children to the care of his brother, but said not a word of his queen, his people, his servants, the payment of his debts, nor of religion !*



CHAPTER II.

THE REIGN OF KING JAMES II.



SECTION I.

The Measures of the Court still opposed to Religious Liberty.

ON the death of king Charles, his brother, JAMES II., succeeded to the crown. The reign of this prince was unprosperous and inglorious. His accession was attended with several considerable advantages; but they were so totally misimproved, that, by bad designs ill laid and worse executed, the affairs of the nation came at last to one of the most remarkable catastrophes recorded in history. It will, therefore, be necessary to furnish the reader with a circumstantial relation of the principal transactions of this short reign, so far as they stood connected with religious emancipation, and tended, by an overruling Providence, eventually to secure the blessing of toleration.

King James had many instructive lessons before him, but seemed not to derive the least advantage from them. He had the fatal example of a father, who, upon the suspicion of promoting popery and arbitrary power, though a professed pro-

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 608, 609.

testant, was sent to his grave by a violent death. In his banishment for more than ten years, he had been acquainted with a foreign princess famous for abilities and learning, who resigned her crown, apprehensive she might be divested of it for embracing popery, by those very subjects who had before held her in the greatest veneration, both on her own account, and on account of her father, who had raised them to the highest degree of glory to which the Swedes ever arrived. He might have remembered the words of his royal mother, upon her return to Somerset-house at the restoration, "That if she had known the temper of the people of England some years before, as well as she did then, she had never been obliged to leave that house." The history of his royal ancestors might have sufficiently taught him, "that those who grasped at immoderate power, or a prerogative above law, were always unfortunate, and their reigns inglorious."*

One of the best historians of the age, said, that king Charles at his death advised James not to think of introducing popery into England, which he considered both dangerous and impracticable. And Ronguillor, the Spanish ambassador, upon his first audience after his majesty's accession, having leave to speak his mind, made bold to say, that he beheld several priests about him, who, he knew, would importune him to alter the established religion of England; but he wished his majesty would not give ear to their advice; for if he did, he was afraid his majesty would have reason to repent of it when it was too late. The king was greatly offended with the freedom of the ambassador, and in a passion asked him, whether in Spain they consulted their confessors? "Yes," answered Ronguillor, "we do, and that is the reason our affairs go so ill." His holiness the pope at the same time addressed a letter to king James, saying, that he was highly pleased with his majesty's zeal for the catholic religion; but he was afraid his majesty might push it too far; and instead of contributing to his own greatness, and to the advancement of the catholic church, he might do the greatest prejudice to both, by attempting that which his holiness was well assured from long experience could not be accomplished.†

* Welwood, p. 151.

† Ibid. p. 153.

How far his majesty profited by all these advices and examples will appear in the sequel. The first act of his reign seemed not ill calculated to confirm the prepossession which the public were too ready to encourage in his favour. The privy-council having assembled immediately on the death of the late king, James signified to them his resolution to govern with clemency, and to maintain the rights and liberties of the people, by the following declaration :

“ Since it hath pleased Almighty God to place me in that station, and I am now to succeed so good and gracious a king, as well as so very kind a brother, I think it fit to declare to you, that I will endeavour to follow his example, especially in that of his great *clemency* and *tenderness* to his people. I have been reported to be a man for arbitrary power ; but that is not the only story that has been made of me ; and I shall make it my endeavour to preserve this government both in church and state, as it is now by law established. I know the principles of the church of England are for monarchy, and the members of it have showed themselves good and loyal subjects ; therefore I shall always take care to defend and support it. I know, too, that the laws of England are sufficient to make the king as great a monarch as I can wish ; and, as I shall never depart from the just rights and prerogatives of the crown, so I shall never invade any man’s property. I have often heretofore ventured my life in defence of this nation, and I shall still go as far as any man in preserving it in all its rights and liberties.”*

This declaration was received with unbounded applause, and, by the desire of the council, was ordered to be printed and dispersed through the nation. Great care was taken to extol the king’s strong affection for his subjects ; but, above all, his unshaken fidelity to his word and promise was so much applauded, that some accounted it impossible for him to promise what he did not intend to perform, who, accordingly, began to call him *James the Just*. The pulpits throughout England were filled with the highest eulogiums on his declaration, and with thanksgivings for so great a favour. The common watchword was, “ We have the word of a king—a word

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 427.

never yet broken ;” and to so great a length was the adulation or delusion carried, that this royal declaration was said to be a better security for the liberty and religion of the people, than even that which the laws of the land could afford !* Had his majesty’s subsequent actions conformed in all points to the liberal sentiments contained in his declaration, his character would have been revered and honoured, both as good and great to the end of time.

Numerous addresses from all parts of the kingdom were presented to the new monarch, couched for the most part in terms of the grossest servility ; which no doubt greatly contributed to lull him into that fatal security which proved the occasion of his ruin. That from the university of Oxford stated, that the religion which they professed, bound them to unconditional obedience to their sovereign, *without limitations or restrictions*, but others were a little more reserved. It is impossible for any man to speak more decidedly in favour of liberty of conscience, than did the king in his answers to the address of the quakers, in which he said—“ Gentlemen, I thank you heartily for your address. Some of you know (I am sure you do, Mr. Penn) that it is my principle, that conscience ought not to be forced, and that *all men ought to have the liberty of their consciences : and what I have promised in my declaration, I will continue to perform as long as I live ; and I hope before I die, to settle it, so that after ages shall have no reason to alter it.*”†

The partisans of the court, and indeed the generality of the people, highly extolled these unequivocal assurances of liberty ; yet they had very early proof how weak and fallacious was the ground of their exultation. In a few days subsequent to this declaration, the nation was alarmed by his majesty’s proclamation, commanding the customs and excise to be paid as before, which had expired at the demise of the late king. This was done not only in flagrant violation of his royal promise, but in open defiance of the laws and the constitution, by which no money could be levied on the subject without the consent of parliament. As it was contrary to law, so it was at this time altogether needless, since a parliament was to assem-

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 620.

† Somers’ Tracts, vol. i. p. 258.

ble in a few days, which no one doubted would grant the same customs to him, as they had granted to his royal brother.*

This unwarrantable extension of power, within the first week of his majesty's reign, presented a melancholy prospect. It appeared that taxes were to be levied by fraud and violence, contrary to the laws of the land. All people were so much under the power of fear or flattery, that none durst complain, and few durst talk of these usurpations. The king now began to say, "He would not be served as his brother had been. He would have all about him serve him without reserve." And the second Lord's day after his accession, he went openly, with all the *insignia* of royalty, to *mass*; to the indignation of most men, and the amazement of all.†

One Caryl also was despatched to Rome in the capacity of agent, to make the king's submission to the pope, and to pave the way for the re-admission of England into the bosom of the holy catholic church. These humble expressions of duty and obedience to holy see, particularly on account of the general state of politics in Europe, were not received with much eagerness or satisfaction. The disposition of the people, which was at this time stupidly passive, encouraged the king to venture upon these illegal measures; but he must have supposed, unless he was incapable of reflection, that the dormant spirit of Englishmen would sooner or later be roused to a firm resistance of this regal despotism.

The parliament assembled in the month of May; when the members "sat down in a good humour, and with a hearty inclination to do every thing in compliance with the king, that would tend to his safety and honour."‡ Their extreme pliancy will not seem at all wonderful, when it is recollected that every court-artifice was used in the management of elections. Through the whole of the nation, injustice and violence had been exercised for many years. In the new charters granted to corporations, the election of members of the new parliament was wrested from the inhabitants, and restrained to the corporation-men, with the exemption of all who were known to be unacceptable at court. To try the inclinations

* Welwood, p. 155.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 623.

‡ Welwood, p. 156.

of the people, and ensure success, closeting came into fashion; and king James was at the trouble to sound the principal persons in offices of public trust, to ascertain how far he might depend upon their concurrence in his designs. If they did not readily promise to serve him *in his own way*, some brand was put upon them, and they were turned out of their places. These illegal and unrighteous methods were so far successful at the public elections throughout the nation, that the king declared, upon inspecting the returns, "there were not above forty members chosen, but such as he wished for." It is, however, extremely questionable, whether the parliament which the king thus laboured to model, would have answered his expectations, had they entered upon public business; for the eyes of men were opened more and more every day, and the noble principles of English liberty were re-kindled in the nation.* It is particularly obvious, that the religion and liberties of England were never exposed to more imminent danger, than under the government of king James, and the guardian care of this parliament.

These unhallowed proceedings, rendered the prospect awfully melancholy. "England now seemed lost," says Burnet, "unless some happy accident should save it." Though the king's speech to the two houses was equally favourable to the property and liberty of the subject, and, upon the principal points, expressed in the same language, as his royal declaration to the council; yet his majesty's spirit and government was a continued violation of both.

The parliament so profusely supplied the exigencies of the government, "that the house was more forward to give, than the king was to ask; to which he thought fit to put a stop by a message, intimating that he desired no more money."† The king considered himself at liberty to prosecute his schemes without control, having the zealous co-operation of the house of commons. Upon the earl of Argyle's invasion of Scotland, a committee of the commons was appointed for the affairs of religion, which considered that invasion as an outrage committed by all the presbyterians of both kingdoms. The particulars of this invasion, were at present unknown, yet the com-

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 626.—Welwood, p. 213, 214.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 638.

mittee passed two votes—"That the committee of the house would stand by his majesty with their lives and fortunes, in defence of the reformed religion of the church of England, as by law established.—That an humble address should be presented to his majesty, desiring him to issue a proclamation, to cause the penal laws to be put in execution against all dissenters whatsoever."*

The latter of these votes was the effect of deep-rooted prejudice, founded on his majesty's promise to support and preserve the church of England to the utmost of his power; and the committee might imagine that the king, though an avowed catholic, was equally disposed as themselves to proceed with rigour against all protestants who scrupled conformity to the established church. When the vote of the committee was put to the house, it was carried in the negative. The house of commons could not think it would be agreeable to the king to cause the penal laws to be executed against *all* dissenters, and consequently against those of his own religion. But on presenting the money bills, the speaker ventured to inform the king, "that on giving his majesty this signal proof of their loyalty and affection, they showed how entirely they relied upon his majesty's royal and repeated declarations to support the protestant religion as professed by the church of England, which was dearer to them than their lives."

This afforded strong proof of their abhorrence of popery, which arose almost to phrensy; but while they expressed their feelings in language so decisive, they were in other respects extremely obsequious and abject. The king received this compliment in rude and ungracious silence. To compensate for freedom so unwelcome, a bill was introduced into the commons, by which any thing said to disparage his majesty's person or government was made high treason. It was projected to ruin all who opposed the court designs.† This erroneous and dangerous bill was very ably opposed by Serjeant Maynard, who said—"If words *alone* could by any construction of the law be converted into treason, no man's life, or liberty, or property could be secure. Words were so liable to be misunderstood and misrepresented, and, by a very small

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 747.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 639.

variation, might be made to convey a sense so contrary to what was intended, that a law like this, which seemed expressly calculated for an instrument of tyranny, would be a virtual surrender of all our privileges into the hands of the sovereign." These arguments could not fail to make some impression upon the house, callous as it seemed to the feelings of honour, and regardless of the national interest; but the great debates upon this bill were suddenly interrupted, and the bill it seems was lost, by the intelligence of the duke of Monmouth's arrival in the West, with an hostile armament from Holland.*

For some time the king was successful in all his attempts according to his heart's desire. He got, in effect, to the height of his power. His parliament not sitting, his standing army increasing, and his revenues sufficient to maintain them, he began more openly to show his resolution, not only to encourage and establish his own religion, but to assume a power more arbitrary than had been ever charged upon any of his family. In so odious an undertaking, he might be hurried forwards by the evil counsel of others, more than by his own private inclination, which was of itself sufficiently strong and yielding to all such impressions.†

Argyle and Monmouth were both defeated, and their forces dispersed. His majesty seemed secure on his throne, and superior to the power of all his enemies. Had the king ordered the speedy execution of such persons as were fit for public examples, and granted a general indemnity; had he covered his intentions till he had got through another session of parliament, it is not easy to imagine with what advantage he might have opened and pursued his designs. But his own arbitrary temper, and the fury of some of his ministers, together with the maxims of his priests, who were become enthusiastical, and who fancied that nothing could stand before him: all these concurred greatly to the loss of advantages which could never be recovered; and the shows of mercy afterwards assumed, were considered only as after-game, to retrieve what was lost.‡

The king being released from all his fears, gave himself up entirely to passionate revenge on those who had been in the

* Belsham, vol. i. p. 45.

† Echard, p. 1074.

‡ Burnet, vol. i. p. 647.

least concerned in the late rebellion. To this end he appointed the savage and infamous Jefferies, with four assistant judges, to punish the Western rebels; and major-general Kirk was ordered to attend him with a body of troops to keep the people in awe. It was impossible for the king to have found in the whole kingdom, two men more destitute of religion, honour, and humanity. "They were two cruel and merciless tigers, that delighted in blood." The judge's behaviour was beyond any thing that was ever heard of in any civilized country. He was perpetually drunk, or in a rage; and he even *required* the prisoners to plead guilty. Thus, if they gave him no trouble, he gave them hopes of favour; otherwise he told them, he would execute the letter of the law upon them with the utmost severity. This made many plead guilty, who had good defence in law. He, however, showed no mercy; but ordered multitudes to be hanged up immediately, without allowing them a moment's time to commit their souls to God. He hanged in all about *six hundred* persons. The impieties with which he treated them, and his behaviour to some of the nobility and gentry, who were well-affected, but pleaded in favour of some of the prisoners, would have amazed any one, if done by a Turkish bashaw.*

The law, says Granger, never wore so terrible an aspect, as when the insolent and cruel Jefferies sat upon the bench; who was, without exception, the worst judge that this, or perhaps any other nation was ever cursed with. In the western assizes, after the defeat of Monmouth, juries were overborne, judgment was given with precipitation; even the common legal forms were neglected, and the laws openly trampled upon, by a murderer in the robes of a lord chief justice. He returned triumphantly to London, and was received with open arms by the king, who delighted to recount the exploits of what he affected to style *Jefferies' campaign*!†

The celebrated Mr. Richard Baxter was a divine always remarkable for his attachment to the monarchical government of his country, and for leaning to moderate measures in the differences between the church, and those of his persuasion; yet

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 750.—Burnet, vol. i. p. 648.

† Granger's Biog. Hist. vol. iv. p. 309.

he was this year arraigned before the tribunal of Jefferies, for the publication of his "Paraphrase on the New Testament," which was styled a scandalous and seditious libel against the government. Several passages being selected, and supposed to contain reflections on the prelates of the church of England, he was, therefore, charged with being guilty of *sedition*! Upon his appearance before the bar of the king's bench, and moving that further time might be allowed him to prepare for his trial, Jefferies, with indignation, exclaimed—"I will not give him a minute's time more to save his life. We have had to do with other sorts of persons, but now we have a *saint* to deal with; and I know how to deal with saints as well as sinners. Yonder," said he "stands Oates in the pillory, and says, he suffers for the truth, and so does Baxter: but if Baxter did but stand on the other side of the pillory with him, I would say, two of the greatest rogues and rascals in the kingdom stood there." His counsel was not suffered to proceed in the defence of his client, but was brow-beaten and interrupted by the judge, in a manner more like Billingsgate, than a tribunal of justice.

After this mock trial before a partial jury, Mr. Baxter was sentenced to pay a fine of five hundred marks, to lie in prison till it was paid, and to be bound to his good behaviour for seven years. The judge upon the bench said, "There was not a honest man in England but who took him for a great knave; and he was sorry that the act of indemnity disabled him from hanging him."* Men, like Jefferies, whose hands were so deeply stained with atrocity and blood, will be branded with universal execration, as long as the records of history shall exist.

The sufferings of the quakers were at this time very great; upon which, they presented a petition to the king and both houses of parliament, giving the following detail of the oppressions under which they groaned:

"One thousand five hundred have been detained prisoners, some of whom have been discharged by the judges, and others freed by death, through their long and tedious imprisonment. There are now remaining about one thousand three hundred

* Palmer, vol. iii. p. 400.—Wilson, vol. ii. p. 124.

and eighty-three. Many are under sentence of premunire, both men and women, and more than three hundred near it ; not for denying the duty of allegiance, but only because they dare not swear : many on writs of excommunication and fines for the king, and upon the act of banishment : besides above three hundred and twenty have died in prison since the year 1660, nearly one hundred of whom since the account delivered to the late king and parliament in 1680 ; thereby making many widows and fatherless children, and leaving them in distress and sorrow.

“ Here in London, the gaol of Newgate hath been from time to time crowded, within these two years, sometimes nearly twenty in one room, to the prejudice of their health ; and several poor innocent tradesmen have of late been so suffocated by the coldness of the prison, that they have been taken out sick of a malignant fever, and died in a few days.

“ Besides these continued and destructive hardships, great violence, outrageous distresses, and woeful havock and spoil have been and still are frequently made upon our goods and estates, by a company of idle, extravagant, and merciless informers, and their prosecutions upon the conventicle act ; and many have been convicted and fined ; though unsummoned, and unheard in their own defence. At the suit of these informers one-third part goes to themselves ; and, on other processes, twenty pounds a month and two-thirds of estates go to the king ; all tending to the ruin of trade, husbandry, and the impoverishing of many industrious families, without compassion shown to widows, fatherless, or desolate. To some, there is not a bed left to rest upon ; to others, no cattle to till their ground, nor corn for bread, nor tool to work with. The said informers and sheriffs’ bailiffs in some places being outrageous and excessive in their seizures, breaking into houses, and making great waste and spoil. All these and other severities are done against us under pretence of serving the king and the church ; thereby to force us to conformity, without inward conviction or satisfaction of our tender consciences, wherein our peace with God is concerned.”

After the recapitulation of ten penal statutes, with the rigorous execution of them, and the numerous painful sufferings they endured, they add—“ Be pleased to make our case your own, and do to us as you would be done unto. As you would

not be oppressed and destroyed in your persons or estates, nor have your properties invaded, and posterities ruined, for serving and worshipping Almighty God, about which you would no doubt wish to enjoy liberty according to your persuasions and consciences; so we entreat you to allow the same liberty to the tender consciences of those who live peaceably under your government, as you would enjoy yourselves; and to disannul the said conventicle act, and stop the devouring informers, and take away all sanguinary laws, corporeal and pecuniary punishments, merely on the score of religion and conscience: and let not the ruin and cry of the widow, fatherless, and innocent families, lie upon this nation, nor at your doors; who have not only a great trust reposed in you for the prosperity of the whole nation, but who also profess Christianity, and the tender religion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Notwithstanding all these long sustained extremities, we do solemnly profess and declare in the sight of the all-seeing God, who is the Searcher of hearts, that we have never been found in any seditious or treasonable designs, which are contrary to our Christian principle and profession; so we have nothing but good-will, and true Christian affection to the king and government, sincerely desiring his and your safety, prosperity and concurrence in mercy and truth, for the good of the whole kingdom.”*

The offer of this petition to the king and parliament, was not without effect. There was much talk of liberty of conscience; and many expected that some guarantee of liberty would soon be made public in print; hence it was commonly reported, “that liberty of conscience was in the press!” Many of the prisoners were now released from their places of confinement.†

The doctrine of unlimited obedience was published from the pulpit with greater zeal and boldness than ever. His majesty’s temper, counsels, and religion were sufficiently known; yet the clergy in general having signified their approbation and joy at his accession, still continued to preach the arrogant and odious doctrines of passive obedience and nonresistance. To avoid giving the least countenance to the royal opinions, it

* Sewel, vol. ii. p. 412.

† Ibid. p. 416.

might have been supposed, that they would to a man have used greater circumspection : but so far were they from using any such precaution, that they trumpeted their favourite dogmas with more industry than ever. How necessary a part of the Christian religion, or at least of the established church, they considered the doctrine of unlimited obedience, is manifest from the insulting importunity with which the unfortunate duke of Monmouth was pressed to acknowledge it even on the scaffold, by the bishops of Ely, and of Bath and Wells, together with Dr. Tenison and Dr. Hooper.*

The king having such clergy his servants and vassals, rode triumphantly in the establishment of popery and arbitrary power. He did not wish to advance the one without the other. If he had aimed only at absolute power, without meddling with religion, he would most probably have succeeded ; since passive obedience was accounted an essential doctrine of the church of England, and was received by most thorough churchmen, who, at his majesty's accession, possessed nearly all the offices of public trust. He presently discovered, that while he wished to be freed from the yoke of the laws, it was chiefly to establish his own religion ; yet the parliament, how much soever devoted to him in all other respects, had not been so pliant as to surrender their religion into his hands. Notwithstanding this refusal, the king hoped to accomplish his purpose, not only by encouraging his servants the clergy in the propagation of his wild arbitrary notions, but by causing the learned judges to give it as their opinion, that he possessed a power to dispense with the laws, and by gaining the members of parliament over to imbibe his views, being resolved not to have another session till he had accomplished his design.†

To promote his endeared object, the king took great freedom with parliament-men ; he caused all who had spoken or voted against his views to be disgraced and turned out of their places, though many of them had hitherto served him with great obsequiousness. He called many of them into his private closet, and addressed them with great warmth on the subject. The king, by a long course of threatening and ill usage

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 749.

† Ibid. p. 754.

on the one hand, by promises and corruption on the other, saw he could not bring them all into a compliance, he at last dissolved the parliament: by which he threw off a body of men who were in all respects secure to him, except in matters of religion; and who would at any time have accepted a very moderate satisfaction from him. My author adds, it would not have been easy to have found in England five hundred men, so weak, so poor, and so devoted to the court, as these were; and thus happily was the nation snatched out of their hands by the precipitated violence of a bigoted court.*

The king adopted the same method with the twelve judges, and in order to persuade them one by one to declare for his dispensing power, he told them plainly he would have all the judges of his own opinion. Lord chief justice Jones, lord chief baron Montague, Sir Job Charlton, and Sir Edward Nevill, with heroic integrity, absolutely refused, and were immediately displaced. These were the best among them. The king appointed four others whose understandings were more pliable and submissive, one of whom was a professed catholic. The privy-council underwent similar alteration, when the king received into it five zealous catholics. All these changes clearly discovered his royal intentions.†

These preparatory measures being adopted, the king soon gave more signal proofs of his design. He had already assumed a power to dispense with the observation of the test in his popish officers. The refusal of the parliament to give their consent to this innovation, had exasperated the king, and made him resolve to exempt all his subjects from the penal laws in religion. As this was against law, he took care to provide a remedy, and endeavoured to prove, by means of his corrupt judges, *That a power in the king to dispense with law, was law!* His papers were industriously dispersed through the kingdom, to prove this pretended right, and to prepare the people for his design. At length all the judges except one, gave their opinions in favour of the king, and made it a general rule in law:—"That the laws of England are the king's laws.—That therefore it is an ancient, inseparable prerogative of the kings of England, as of all other sovereign princes, to

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 668.

† Kennet, vol. iii. p. 451, 452.

dispense with all penal laws, in particular cases, and upon particular reasons.—That of these reasons and necessities the king is the sole judge.—That, consequently, this is not a trust invested in and granted to the king, but the ancient remains of the sovereign power of the kings of England, which never was yet taken from them, nor ever can be.”*

Upon this remarkable decision, the catholics set up the popish worship and open mass in every part of the kingdom. The Jesuits erected colleges and seminaries in many of the principal towns; when four popish bishops were publicly consecrated in the king's chapel; and sent to exercise their episcopal functions in their respective dioceses, under the title of vicars apostolical. Their pastoral letters addressed to the lay catholics were printed at the king's printing office, and dispersed through the nation. The monks appeared in the habits of their respective orders at Whitehall and St. James's, and scrupled not to declare, “that they hoped in a little time, to walk in procession through Cheapside.” Since many converts were expected, that so plentiful a harvest might not be deficient of labourers, swarms of priests and monks came over from the continent. The only way now to preferment was to be a papist, and an advocate of arbitrary power. All the affairs of the council were, presently after his majesty's accession, under the superintendence of catholics, or those who had no serious regard for religion. Thus, by the decision of eleven or twelve judges, nominated and corrupted by the king, the laws and constitution of England were torn in pieces.

The king did not claim this high prerogative without knowing how to use it. In imitation, therefore, of his royal predecessors, and with a design to accomplish his endeared object, he sent a circular letter to the bishops, accompanied with an express prohibition of all the inferior clergy from preaching upon points of controversy, through fear, as was pretended, of raising animosities among the people. Thus it was, that the persecution commenced in the reign of bloody Mary, and it could not seem strange that a popish king should imitate so zealous and illustrious an example. On this occasion, many of the dignified clergy, and those most distinguished for piety

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 755.

and learning, discovered their erroneous principles; and, without prevaricating in the discharge of their official duties, they preached openly on controverted points, making their sermons chiefly upon them. To preach in opposition to the royal command was to the generality of the clergy, a thing absolutely novel, and a manifest violation of their former principles; but their noble effort evinced, on the one hand, their former spiritual slavery, and, on the other, their desire of some degree of religious emancipation. The clergy in general, therefore, made some amends for their past errors.*

The king and his council were extremely offended with this intrepidity, and adopted prompt measures for suppressing this supposed clerical insolence. By virtue of the royal supremacy, a new ecclesiastical court was established, in direct opposition to the act of parliament by which the high commission had been abolished, expressly prohibiting the revival of it in any form whatever. "In contempt of this law," says Burnet, "the court was erected, with full power to proceed in a summary and arbitrary way in all ecclesiastical matters, without limitations to any rule of law in their proceedings."† This stretch of the supremacy, so contrary to law, placed king James in a situation similar to that of Nebuchadnezzar: "Whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive; whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down."

This illegal commission had power, under the king, to exercise and execute all manner of spiritual or ecclesiastical jurisdictions; to visit, reform, redress, and amend all abuses, offences, contempts, and enormities whatsoever, which by the spiritual or ecclesiastical laws of the realm might be lawfully corrected. The commissioners were commanded to inquire into all offences, contempts, and misdemeanors that they might be corrected and punished according to the censures of the church; they were required to search for, and call before them, all ecclesiastical persons of what degree or dignity soever, and to punish the offenders by excommunications, suspensions, deprivations, or other ecclesiastical censures. They were empowered to send for all statutes, rules, letters patent of

* Rapin, vol. ii. p. 755.—Burnet, vol. i. p. 673.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 675.

universities, colleges, grammar schools, and all other ecclesiastical corporations; and authorized to correct, amend, and alter them as they saw most convenient.*

King Henry VIII., by virtue of his high supremacy, had formerly appointed a vicar-general and other commissioners, to act in ecclesiastical causes, in a manner "too absolute for any prince;" and surely this illegal assumption of king James II. proved him to be not less absolute than his royal predecessor. The measure was condemned by the best lawyers "as illegal, and the very creatures of the court seemed to be conscious of it."† The nomination of catholics to be judges of protestants in all matters of doctrine and discipline, was certainly no very comely sight, betraying the intentions of the crown. This "new court of inquisition was a manifest violation of the laws of the land."‡

The commissioners, thus armed, did not wait for an opportunity to exercise their authority. Dr. Sharp, rector of St. Giles', London, "a very pious man, and one of the most popular preachers of the age," ventured, in direct opposition to the royal injunction, to expose and refute the errors and absurdities of popery, in a sermon preached in his own parish church. This was immediately carried to court, and represented as a personal reflection upon the king; upon which the king sent an order to the bishop of London, requiring him without delay to suspend Sharp, and then to examine judiciously into the truth of the accusation. The bishop replied, that he had no power to proceed in this summary way; but if an examination were regularly brought into his court, he would inflict such censure as could be warranted by law. In consequence of this refusal, and for this act of disobedience, the bishop was cited before the commissioners, and suspended from all ecclesiastical jurisdiction, during his majesty's pleasure; on which occasion, Jefferies, recently for his eminent services advanced to the chancellorship, treated this prelate with rudeness and insolence equally disgusting as the sentence itself. Even the princess of Orange, for presuming to intercede with the king in behalf of the bishop, who had long stood high in her esteem and favour, was severely reprimanded by the king, "for meddling in such matters."

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 454.

† Ibid. p. 456.

‡ Echard, p. 1077.

The court, by these despotic proceedings, seemed more uneasy than before, having obtained so poor a victory : for the bishop was now more esteemed and caressed than ever. His clergy, notwithstanding his suspension, were more governed by his private instructions, than they had been before by his episcopal authority.* Thus, to the great mortification of the court party, they testified their hatred of popish intolerance, and their attachment to the cause of religious freedom.

The king conducted the affairs of the church as if he had formed a determination to involve himself every day in some new difficulty ; accordingly, he sent a royal mandate to the university of Cambridge, requiring the degree of master of arts to be conferred on father Francis, a Benedictine monk. The university, clearly perceiving that by a compliance with this mandate a door would be opened for the admission of papists, who would soon become a majority of the senate, peremptorily refused to obey the king's order ; for which the vicechancellor was summoned before the ecclesiastical commission to answer for his contempt, and, by sentence of that court, was ejected from his office.

His majesty embraced this opportunity of engaging in a quarrel of a more serious nature with the university of Oxford. That learned body had a few years before passed a solemn decree in full convocation, approving and confirming the doctrines of passive obedience and nonresistance in the most explicit terms, as we have already stated. The time was now arrived to demonstrate the difference between the theory, and practice of those absurd principles. The president of Magdalen college, one of the richest foundations in the university, dying at this juncture, a mandate was sent in favour of one Farmer, a papist, and a man in other respects, by the statutes of the house, ineligible to the office. The fellows of the college made submissive applications to the king to recall his mandate : but the king not deigning to notice them, they unanimously chose Dr. Hough, a man eminent both for virtue and ability, and who afterwards filled with distinguished reputation the see of Worcester. The new president and fellows, being cited before the ecclesiastical commissioners for this con-

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 677.—Kennet, vol. iii. p. 457—460.

tumacy, brought allegations against Farmer of such a nature, that the court did not deem it expedient to insist upon their nomination; but, affirming that the college ought to have shown greater respect to the king's letter than to have proceeded to an election in opposition to it, the commissioners took upon them to declare Hough's election null, and to put the house under suspension. A new mandate, was, accordingly, issued in favour of Parker, an abject tool of the court, and lately created bishop of Oxford. The college humbly represented, that a president having been already legally chosen, it was not in their power to deprive him of his office, or to substitute any other in his place; that, even in case of vacancy, Parker did not possess the qualifications according to the statutes, which by oath they were bound to observe; and that, as their loyalty had been ever conspicuous, they entreated his majesty to believe that their present opposition to his royal will arose solely from their inability to conform to it. The refusal of the Oxonians furnishes an instance out of innumerable ones, that it is much easier to *preach* the erroneous doctrine of unlimited obedience, than to *practise* it. As the university of Oxford "had asserted the king's prerogative in the highest strains of the most abject flattery, both in their addresses, and in their wild decree only three years before this;" so it was thought not a little remarkable, that they "should be the first body in the nation that should feel the effects of it most sensibly."*

The collegian arguments, however, made no favourable impression on the haughty and inflexible disposition of the king; and, in a visit which he soon after made to the university, he sent for the president and fellows to attend him in person, and, in high and threatening language, commanded them without further excuse or delay to make choice of Parker. As the learned collegians now discarded their erroneous doctrine of nonresistance, and still refused to degrade themselves by compliance, their new president was ejected by violence. The doors of the college were forcibly broken open, and Parker, by this seizure, put in possession! The fellows, excepting two, who submitted, were deprived of their fellowships, without

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 699.

any process of law ; and, in the same way, their places were bestowed upon men devoted to the royal will and pleasure.

This act of undisguised despotism inflamed the minds of all ranks and orders of men with anger and indignation. Fellowships being always considered of the nature of freeholds, it was evident that no man's property was secure, and that nothing less than absolute subjection to the arbitrary pleasure of the king was now required of the people. Popery could not be established without the exercise of tyranny ; and the nation, placed in these perilous circumstances, began to consider of a remedy.*

The king had for some time betrayed his wishes and attempts to dispense with the test laws. He began by observing, that they had been made particularly against himself ; the former to turn him out of the admiralty, the latter to pave the way for his exclusion ; and that it was an affront to him to insist upon the observance of those laws. Without hesitation, therefore, he promoted zealous papists to public offices, both in the government and in the army ; and he declared openly, that he should consider all those his enemies who would not consent to the repeal of these laws in the next parliament !

The leading courtiers, now being catholics, and encouraged by their prince, began on all occasions to declaim loudly against the test. It was said to be against the rights of the crown to deny the king the service of all his subjects, and to be against the dignity of peerage to subject the lords to any other tests than their allegiance, while it was considered as an insufferable affront against the king, to oblige all whom he should employ to swear that his religion was idolatrous. On the other hand, the test was accounted by all its advocates and friends, as the sure guardian of the religion and church of England, against the encroachments of popery. The men in high military stations were zealous for the test ; concluding, that, if it should be abolished, they must either change their religion, or lose their employments. “ The clergy, who had for the most part run without hesitation into all the king's interests, began now to open their eyes.”†

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 475—480.—Belsham, vol. i. p. 63—66.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 652.

His majesty having declared that he would be served by none but those who would vote for the repeal of the test, called the marquis of Halifax, and inquired of him how he meant to act; who, having frankly declared his firm attachment to the test, was immediately turned out of his place, and the earl of Sunderland, a more pliant courtier, was made lord president. In the house of commons there were many warm debates upon the violations of the test act. The reasoning is said to have been clear and full, on the one hand; while, on the other, the courtiers offered nothing in the way of argument, but the danger of offending the king, and of creating a misunderstanding between him and his commons. In the conclusion, they unanimously voted an address to the king, that he would maintain the laws, especially that concerning the test; at which his majesty expressed his resentment with much vehemence, accusing certain persons of intending to disturb the good correspondence between him and them, to the great prejudice of the nation. The two houses were united in their opposition to the arbitrary measures of the court; and the king, finding he could carry nothing without sacrificing his revered despotic principles, suddenly prorogued the parliament. His majesty being resolved to show his prerogative, as well as revenge himself upon the party, disgraced and turned out of their public offices, those who had spoken or voted in favour of the test.*

The propriety or impropriety of abolishing the test undoubtedly involves a question of great importance. It was considered by all churchmen at this period as the principal barrier against popery, and the grand bulwark of the established religion. But, surely, this was not much to the honour either of religion or the church of England; since they must have rested on a very precarious foundation, when, for their protection, they required such flagrant infringements on the rights of mankind. The political religion of states and kingdoms may, and always will, require the aid of political enactments, and will after all be oftentimes exposed to imminent danger: but the religion of Christ, which rests on the foundation of its own evidence, and constantly enjoys the protection

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 654, 666, 667.

of its Great Author, needs no such frail and fickle assistance. Christianity, when cordially received, creates its own resolute defence in every man's conscience ; and, as this affords better protection than all the tests and penal laws in the world, so its Author has announced its security : " Upon this rock I will build my church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The test, founded on the odious principles of intolerance, injustice, and exclusion, gives occasion to the open profanation of one of the most sacred institutions of our holy religion, by compelling the greatest profligates to receive the sacrament as a qualification for a civil office. A law so opposite both to justice and piety, ought certainly to be repealed ; and every one ought to contribute to the utmost of his power, towards promoting so generous a design. The arbitrary and popish intentions of the crown, formed an objection of no weight. The oaths of allegiance and supremacy would at any time afford inconceivably greater security against popery, than all the religious tests that men could devise ; the truth of this is incontrovertibly established by the experience and history of our country. Those laws which deprived so many Englishmen of the rights of mankind, disunited his majesty's subjects, loosened the sinews and weakened the strength of the nation, were so many acts of injustice : they could not fail, therefore, to be displeasing to God. The plea of policy can be of no weight when placed in the balance against justice and Christianity. This unquestionably deserves the serious consideration of all who uphold the test-laws in the present day.

SECTION II.

*Great national Events tending to the Overthrow of arbitrary Power,
and calculated to promote a friendly Union among Christians.*

THE house of commons had pressed the king, soon after his accession, to issue his proclamation for the execution of the penal laws against all nonconformists to the church of England. But bishops Rosse and Paterson, the two governing prelates of Scotland, went much farther, and discovered

their cruel infatuation by wishing to destroy all protestant nonconformists. They procured an address to be signed by several of their brethren, offering to concur with the king in every thing he desired in behalf of the catholics, provided the laws might still continue in force, and be executed against presbyterians.* Many persons were at this time of the same mind in England.

Nothing could, however, be more evident, than that the penal laws, by which the nonconformists had been so cruelly persecuted for many years, were put into the hands of protestants to destroy their fellow-protestants, and so make it more easy to introduce popery which was intended to destroy the remainder; nevertheless, high churchmen, whose zealous co-operation greatly assisted in this service, could not be brought to renounce their principles, and relent their practice, till the knife was laid to their own throats, and they were themselves upon the point of being offered in sacrifice to an arbitrary monarch. Then they awoke from their long slumber, and altered their course, as will more fully appear in the sequel of this reign.

As a parliamentary repeal of the test could not be obtained, it was thought necessary to establish the dispensing power of the crown by a solemn judicial decision. For this purpose, a domestic of Sir Edward Hales, a distinguished catholic, who held a commission in the army, was directed to lodge an information against his master for non-compliance with the test, and to claim the reward of *five hundred* pounds, secured by law to the informer. Before this interesting cause came to a trial, the judges, as already stated, were tampered with and corrupted by the king, and made to recognise the legality of the dispensing power. In favour of this alarming and unconstitutional assumption, it was argued by the court lawyers, "that the exercise of this high authority was very ancient in England; that the parliament had more than once acknowledged this prerogative of the crown; that the government of England was entirely in the king; that the crown was imperial and absolute; and that all penal laws were lodged in the crown to enable the king to force the execution of the law,

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 680.

but were not bars to limit or bind up the king's power." Lord chief justice Herbert, successor to Jefferies, presided on this extraordinary occasion, and assumed as incontrovertible propositions, "that the laws were the king's laws; that the king might dispense with his laws in cases of necessity; and that he was the sole judge of this necessity." To these accommodating, courtly doctrines it was indignantly replied, "that it was false to affirm that the dispensing power of the crown had ever been established by law; that the exercise of that power had been long submitted to; and that it anciently formed a salutary branch of the royal prerogative." In the conclusion, all the venerable judges except one gave it as their opinion, that the dispensing power was a legal and indefeasible branch of the royal prerogative! so that "the laws of England were basely given up to the power and will of the king," and the nation beheld with tears of grief this new triumph of despotism.* No monarch ever conducted his affairs more inconsistently than king James, whose actions palpably contradicted his professions, breaking down those laws which he had so often declared his determination to maintain, even for the benefit of those men whom he had imprisoned or banished, as if he had designed to extirpate the whole of their race.

The king having advanced so rapidly on the road to Rome, the clergy at length took the alarm, and began to tremble for their livings, and their consequence in the state. James, exceedingly indignant at this, suddenly turned about, and, by every possible means, courted the dissenters, pretending that he had always wished to favour them, but the clergy had opposed him, offering rather to yield to the catholics, provided they might be allowed to crush the dissenters. The court affected to adopt a new language; when the wisdom, justice, and expediency of a universal toleration in religion, became on a sudden the prevailing and favourite topics of conversation. This language was intended, as indeed it was well calculated to gain the confidence and conciliate the affections of the dissenters, who, at this juncture, were "as much cherished, as they had been before oppressed and persecuted." "Churchmen were unexpectedly disgraced, and the dissenters raised to

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 670.—Echard, p. 1077.

high favour." "The king made the cruelty of the church of England the common subject of discourse;" and he reproached her members for having engaged so often in "violent persecution of the dissenters."*

The king was particularly concerned to enjoy the assistance of those whom he had liberated from the iron hand of oppression, in order that he might be able to accomplish that object against which the more obedient and submissive sons of the church were violently opposed. He was perpetually exclaiming with affected abhorrence of the late oppressive proceedings; and was resolved to direct the artillery of his prerogative against churchmen, in order to make them feel a portion of that smart with which they had chastised others. He appointed commissioners throughout England, to make inquiry into all the vexatious suits by which the dissenters had been harassed in the ecclesiastical courts, and the illegal compositions extorted from them to purchase their redemption from further persecution, returning the names of all persons who had received their money or seized their goods. This struck with terror all informers, justices, and others, who had taken an active part in these disgraceful practices, and who now expected to be ruined. Had the dissenters come forwards in evidence, and the scheme been put in execution, "it would have made a scandalous discovery of the ill practices of the ecclesiastical courts. The use that many who belonged to them had made of the laws with relation to dissenters, was, to draw presents from such as could make them, threatening them with a process in case they failed to do that, and, upon their doing it, leaving them at full liberty to neglect the laws as much as they pleased. It was hoped at court, that this fury against the church would have animated the dissenters to turn upon the clergy with some of that fierceness with which they had been lately treated."† The dissenters, however, took no advantage of the disposition of the court, nor of the opportunity now offered them of making reprisals on their adversaries.

King James ventured, at length, to issue an absolute and plenary indulgence, including an entire suspension of all penal

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 633.—Burnet, vol. i. p. 672, 715.

† Ibid.

laws in matters of religion ; and, claiming the service of all his subjects, he pronounced them all equally capable of public offices. The new court-maxim, with which the king entertained all who were about him, was the happiness of a universal toleration : and he said “ nothing was more reasonable, more Christian, and more politic.” He tried the experiment with great success first in Scotland. The preamble to the royal indulgence set forth, that the king had so absolute a power vested in him, that all his subjects were bound to obey him without reserve. In consequence of this lofty claim, he repealed all the penal laws, and removed all the disabilities of his Roman catholic subjects, making them capable of any employment or benefice. He slackened the laws against the moderate presbyterians ; and promised, that he would never force his subjects to change their religion. He repealed all laws imposing tests on those in offices of public trust ; in the place of which he required them to renounce the principles of rebellion, and to defend the king in this absolute power against all his adversaries.

By this stretch of the prerogative, the king raised his power, not only to the suspending, but to the repealing of the laws, and to the enactment of new ones by his own authority. His claiming this absolute power, which all were bound to obey, “ was an invasion of all that was either legal or sacred.”*

The rising monarch, charmed with the ready compliance of the Scots, and considering this as a favourable precedent for England, summoned his council, and signified, that it was his intention to publish a similar declaration in England. He grounded his resolution on the fact, that the endeavours to establish a uniformity in the four preceding reigns had proved ineffectual ; had been exceedingly prejudicial to the nation ; and that it was agreeable to Christianity, that no man should be persecuted for conscience’ sake. Conscience, in his opinion, could not be forced.† The council approved of the royal determination, and greatly applauded his majesty’s indulgence of all his subjects.

The declaration of universal liberty was published April 4, 1687 ; in the preamble of which the king protested his aver-

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 713.

† Rapin, vol. ii. p. 758.

sion against all persecution on the score of religion, and the necessity he found of allowing all his subjects liberty of conscience. In these generous sentiments he expected the concurrence of his two houses of parliament; and he renewed his promise of maintaining the church of England as by law established. With this open avowal, he suspended all the sanguinary statutes for the establishment of religion; and, since the service of all subjects was due to him by the laws of nature, he declared them all equally capable of public employments, and set aside the oaths and tests by which this had been restricted. In the conclusion, he promised to maintain all his subjects in the full enjoyment of their property, but especially in the secure possession of the abbey lands.*

This extension of royal power, says Burnet, gave great offence to all true patriots, as well as to all churchmen. The king assumed the power of repealing laws by his own authority. He pretended, indeed, only to suspend them; but there was no limitation to this suspension, so it amounted to an actual repeal. His majesty's high pretensions of love and charity, and to the hatred of persecution, sounded strangely from the mouth of a popish prince. His signifying that he expected the full concurrence of parliament seemed ridiculous; for it was manifest from the numerous prorogations, that the king was too well assured they would not concur with him. His promising to maintain his subjects in the possession of the abbey lands, seemed as if the design of setting up popery was thought very nearly accomplished, otherwise there was no need of making allusion to any such thing.†

It is very probable, that there was not a single person in the nation, who thought the king designed to favour the nonconformists; and every one clearly saw, that his object was to establish popery, upon the ruins of protestantism. For how could it be supposed, that the king should at once turn from a violent persecutor, to be a zealous advocate of universal toleration? Or, what assurance was there that his promises to nonconformists would be better observed, than those which he had so repeatedly made to the church of England?‡ The nonconformists had so long groaned under the rod of spiritual

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 464. † Burnet, vol. i. p. 714. ‡ Rapin, vol. ii. p. 758.

tyranny, their minds were so embittered against the iniquities of persecution, and against those who were the authors of their sufferings, that it cannot be thought very marvellous if some of them discovered the symptoms of satisfaction, or even of exultation, at this restoration of their liberty and their dearest rights. They had lately been so harassed and persecuted, that it was no wonder some of them were eager to lay hold of this opportunity of sheltering themselves from oppression. Indeed, it is natural for people who labour under violent and racking pains greedily and thankfully to receive any remedies to promote their present ease, without considering whether it be a friendly or unfriendly hand that administers the quieting potion; but as soon as the treacherous effects of the medicine are detected, and the distemper returns with redoubled fury, they will in all probability censure the authors of their additional torments. This was in fact the situation with some of the nonconformists, who were now released from their prisons, and allowed the free exercise of their religion. They were not so fond of persecution and other ill usage, as to refuse their liberty now frankly offered them, which neither their prayers, nor their tears could procure before; nor did they think it consistent with good manners to inquire too minutely how that liberty was obtained, so long as they were sheltered from their former oppressions.* Some from among the various denominations, accordingly, presented their grateful acknowledgements to the king, who had rescued them from their long sufferings; and, by the same royal act, had restored to God *the empire over conscience*; and published to the world his royal Christian judgment, *that conscience might not be forced*; with his resolution, that such force should not be attempted in his kingdoms, during his majesty's reign.†

The answer which he returned to one of these addresses was very remarkable. "Gentlemen," said king James, "I have already found two good effects of my declaration; the easing and pleasing of my subjects, and my restoring to God the empire over conscience. It has been my judgment a long time, that no one has, or ought to have, any power over the conscience but God. I understand there are some jealousies

* Welwood, p. 191.

† Kennet, vol. iii. p. 465.

among my subjects, that I have done this in a design : but you look like gentlemen of too great ingenuity to entertain any such suspicion. Gentlemen, I protest before God, and I desire you to tell all manner of people of all persuasions, as you have opportunity to converse with them, that I have no other design than that I have spoken of. And, gentlemen, I hope to live to see the day, when you shall as well have Magna Charta for the liberty of conscience, as you have had for your properties. And now, gentlemen, do you so preach to your hearers as they may be good Christians, and then I do not question that they will be good subjects.”*

To ingratiate himself farther in the good opinion of the nonconformists, the king and his courtiers talked loudly of the popular laws which were intended to be enacted at the approaching parliament, and of the additional securities by which the liberties of the subject would be guarded.† Had all these sentiments proceeded from the king’s heart, they would have redounded greatly to his honour ; but it is evident that his favour to the dissenters, was only a cloak for the introduction of popery. Many of the dissenters clearly perceived the secret venom hid in these indulgent declarations, that though the king had granted a toleration to all his subjects, the catholics alone were intended to reap the benefit of it ; and that all the places of trust, civil and military, would soon fall into their hands. The sudden favours which men receive from an inveterate enemy are always suspicious ; so they discovered on this occasion, that the reason of this apparent kindness of the king and his party, was only because their efforts to engage the church of England in their sinister designs had proved ineffectual.‡

Some of the nonconformists were lifted up with the royal indulgence ; but most of them, especially those of superior discernment, rejoiced with trembling, and received the favour with great coldness ; nay, some there were who even concurred with the episcopal clergy in adhering to the old system. This was considered strange conduct from persons in their situation. However criminal might be the motives of the king

* Biog. Britan. vol. i. p. 168.

† Belsham, vol. i. p. 58.

‡ Kennet, vol. iii. p. 465.

in granting toleration, we do not see that the nonconformists were bound to inquire into it, or even to undervalue the favour when offered to them. The enjoyment of complete toleration was matter of pure justice due to all, and one of those rights and benefits which was conferred upon them by their Creator; so to have rejected it merely on account of the quarter whence it came, would have been the height of absurdity.

The dissenters in general showed themselves the warm patrons of universal toleration. They could not feel so partial to oppression, as to refuse liberty when it was offered them. They were, indeed, as inimical to popery as any of the episcopalians; but were not so fond of restraint and persecution as to quarrel with their liberty, because it was extended to papists, or secured to them by a tyrant.

They had no great cause to thank the king for his good wishes towards them. It was visible to all men, that they were courted not from any kindness, or good opinion the king had of them; but persons of the meanest discernment could see that all this appearance of favour was to bring in popery, under the colour of a general toleration, till it should be strong enough to promote a general persecution. As they could not engage themselves to support the king's arbitrary prerogative; so they refused to enter into any engagements for the increase of popery. They believed that the royal indignation against churchmen, and the kindness to them, were too unnatural to last long. The principal among them, resolved, on the one hand, not to stand at too great a distance from the court, nor to provoke the king so far as to give him cause to think they were irreconcilable to him, lest they should provoke him to make up the differences on any terms with the church; and, on the other, they resolved not to provoke the church party, or drive them into a reconciliation with the court.*

Some few, indeed, were betrayed by the insidious arts of the court into a conduct more subservient to its views, and expressive of an approbation of its dispensing power. They even accepted commissions as *regulators* for the support of it, and were employed by the king to go through the country, to improve their interest by securing it public countenance. As

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 703.

might be expected, the corrupt and dastardly conduct of these agents of administration, brought unjust reproach and infamy on the whole body ; and many improper reflections were cast upon them for hazarding, by a compliance with the popish party, both the protestant religion, and the civil liberties of the nation. To wipe off these foul reproaches, they publicly and explicitly declared, “ that to the utmost of their knowledge there was not one congregation that gave their consent to any thing of that nature, nor did even countenance any of their members to own an absolute power in the king to dispense with penal laws and tests ; being well satisfied that his doing this by his sole prerogative, would lay the foundation for the destruction of the protestant religion, and bring slavery into the kingdom.” This conduct, as they intimated, was to them a proof of the peculiar power of religious and patriotic principles ; considering the strong temptations under which they had been placed to acquiesce in the king’s design, from their great sufferings in the ecclesiastical courts, from the constant molestations of vile informers, from the common ruin of their estates, and from the deprivation of their liberties. But the great body of the dissenters resolutely refused to concur in the measures of king James, and manifested their readiness to suffer according to the penal laws against them, rather than to support his majesty’s claim of a dispensing power.*

Churchmen, at the same time, considered the royal declaration as the just judgment of heaven for the sufferings which had been inflicted on the nonconformists under Charles II. ; upon which they began to censure the indiscreet zeal of the ambitious prelates ; who, it is said, had reduced the dissenters, in England, Scotland, and Ireland, to the necessity not only of accepting, but of suing for this general indulgence. They were now made sensible, that those who had prompted them to the execution of the penal laws, sought only to prevent the dissenters from uniting with the church, and to play them one against the other ; till their divisions added sufficient strength to the catholics, to destroy them both.†

The penal laws being suspended, the meetings of nonconformists, which for years had in general been maintained with

* Biog. Britan. vol. v. p. 62.

† Kennet, vol. iii. p. 465.

great secrecy and danger, were held in public. The high party, which had betrayed the liberties of their country, turned about, and became exceedingly patriotic. The church, as well as the king, courted the dissenters. This terminated the prosecutions of the nonconformists; who wisely improved their liberties, without inquiring what was the design of the robber in restoring to them their native rights; concluding, that if they could preach the Gospel, and, under God, make men Christians, it would be the most effectual way to prevent their becoming papists. The king in vain tempted them to active concurrence with his illegal measures; and when he found them so determined against sacrificing their country's liberties, he said, "they were an ill-natured people that could not be gained."*

The king had published his first declaration for an entire liberty of conscience to all his subjects, and, in virtue of which, had filled almost all the public offices with catholics; but this was not thought a sufficient stretch of power; so his majesty, the following year, issued his *second* declaration, which was granted for the benefit of catholics alone,† and was as follows:

"Our conduct has been such in all times as ought to have persuaded the world, that we are firm and constant in our resolutions; yet that easy people may not be abused by the malice of crafty wicked men, we think fit to declare, that our intentions are not changed since April 4, 1687, when we issued our declaration for liberty of conscience. [*Here the liberty granted in the former declaration was recited at length.*] Ever since we granted this indulgence, we have made it our principal care to see it preserved without distinction, as we are encouraged to do daily by multitudes of addresses, and many other assurances we receive from our subjects of all persuasions, as testimonies of their satisfaction and duty: the effects of which we doubt not but the next parliament will plainly show; and that it will not be in vain, that we have resolved to use our utmost endeavours to establish liberty of conscience, on such just and equitable foundations as will render it unalterable, and secure to all people the free exercise of their religion for ever; by which future ages may reap the benefit of what is so

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 633, 640.

† Welwood, p. 206.

undoubtedly for the general good of the whole kingdom. It is such a security we desire without the burden of oaths and tests, which have been unhappily made by some governments, but could never support any : nor should men be advanced by such means to offices and employments, which ought to be the reward of services, fidelity, and merit.

“ We must conclude, that not only good Christians will join in this, but whoever is concerned for the increase of the wealth and power of the nation. It would perhaps prejudice some of our neighbours, who might lose part of those advantages they now enjoy, if liberty of conscience were settled in these kingdoms, which are above all others most capable of improvements, and of commanding the trade of the world. In pursuance of this great work, we have been forced to make many changes both of civil and military officers throughout our dominions, not thinking that any ought to be employed in our service who will not contribute towards establishing the peace and greatness of their country, which we most earnestly desire, as unbiassed men may see by the whole conduct of our government, and by the condition of our fleet and armies, which with good management shall be constantly the same, and greater if the safety or honour of the nation require it.

“ We recommend these considerations to all our subjects, and that they will reflect on their present ease and happiness, how far above three years that it has pleased God to permit us to reign over these kingdoms, we have not appeared to be that prince our enemies would have made the world afraid of: our chief aim having been, not to be the oppressor, but the father of our people, of which we can give no better evidence than by conjuring them to lay aside all private animosities, as well as groundless jealousies, and to choose such members of parliament as may do their parts to finish what we have begun for the advantage of the monarchy, over which Almighty God hath placed us, being resolved to call a parliament to meet in November next.”*

The king was not satisfied with publishing this declaration in the usual way, but was resolved to have it publicly recognised as the political religion of the church. No fact can be

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 481.

more obvious than that the bishops and clergy had incessantly, and with great zeal, promoted that arbitrary power by the exercise of which this declaration was published; yet, on account of the liberty which it secured to those beyond their own sect, no class of men were more averse to the measure; therefore the court was determined to mortify them, by making them accessory to their own ruin, and, as one proudly threatened, by compelling them “even to eat their own dung:” so an order was issued from the king, who commanded this declaration to be publicly read at the usual time of divine service, in all churches and chapels throughout the kingdom, commanding the bishops to cause it to be circulated for this purpose through their respective dioceses.

Upon the adoption of this wild measure, citations were issued to the chancellors and archdeacons, to return lists of all the clergy, including those who had obeyed, as well as those who had not obeyed. Some of the bishops absolutely refused to obey the order, and others excused themselves; but, on the arrival of the day to which they were cited, the bishop of Rochester, having obeyed the royal command, and hitherto united with the other commissioners, but always voting on the side of moderation, beheld all things fast hastening the ruin of the church, when he absolutely refused sitting any longer among them. He also wrote a letter to the commissioners, declaring that it was impossible for him to unite with them any longer. He had, indeed, obeyed the order of the council, which he protested he had done because he was bound in conscience so to do; yet he had no doubt that those who had not obeyed it had acted on the same principle of conscience, and he had much rather suffer with them, than concur in making them suffer. This honest firmness in the venerable prelate stopped the proceedings, and put the court to a stand: so they adjourned themselves, and never sat any more.*

The ever-memorable doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance were now brought to the test. These doctrines had been universally applauded by the clergy, from the pulpit and the press, for upwards of twenty years, even so long as they promoted their own outward ease and secular advantage, and

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 745.

were the means of degrading and oppressing the nonconformists; but as soon as their power and worldly interest was in danger, and the burdens were removed from the sufferers, they felt themselves involved in the greatest possible dilemma. They must either renounce their former doctrines, and act in direct opposition against what they had taught for so long a period, or obey the royal order. Placed in these painful circumstances, how did they act? "Some of them, through *fear* or *mistake*, and others to make their *court*, complied; but the generality refused to obey!"*

Bishop Burnet having been in conversation with James, some years before he was made king, assured the prince that it was impossible for him, being a catholic, to reign peaceably in this country; to which James quickly replied, "Does not the church of England maintain the doctrine of nonresistance and passive obedience?" "I begged of him not to depend on that," says the prelate; "for there was a distinction in that matter, which would be found out when men thought they stood in need of it."† This was certainly the time when the clergy thought so; therefore they presently veered about to suit their own convenience.

The reader will clearly perceive, as before intimated, that it is much easier to vociferate opinions in *theory*, and when they promote men's secular advantage, than to defend those opinions in *practice*, in time of impending *danger*. Their refusal laid them open to the severe lashes of the ecclesiastical commission; and, accordingly, all who refused to read the declaration in their churches, were ordered to be prosecuted before this inexorable tribunal; where, my author adds, they were infallibly to expect deprivation; and so most of the benefices in England must have been vacant for new incumbents; but the scene changed before all this could be accomplished.‡

The king having issued his unnatural order, archbishop Sancroft, a man of high monarchical principles, after consulting such of his brethren as he could convene on this emergency, agreed with them to present a petition to the king against his declaration; stating in the most submissive terms, that their unwillingness to observe his royal order did not arise

* Welwood, p. 207. † Burnet's Speech, p. 5. ‡ Welwood, p. 207.

from “ any want of duty and obedience to his majesty, nor from any want of tenderness to dissenters ; in relation to whom they were willing to come to such a temper as should be thought fit, when the matter should be considered in the parliament and convocation : but, among other considerations, because that declaration was founded upon such a dispensing power as had often been declared illegal in parliament ; and that they could not in prudence, honour, or conscience, so far make themselves parties to it, as the distribution of it all over the nation, and the solemn publication of it once and again, even in God’s house and in the time of divine service, must amount to in common and reasonable construction.” The king received this petition with vehement marks of displeasure, and said, “ I have heard of this before, but did not believe it. I did not expect this from the church of England, especially from some of you. If I change my mind, you shall hear from me ; if not, I expect my command shall be obeyed.” The bishops replied, “ We resign ourselves to the will of God,” and then retired : but the six prelates who presented this petition, and the archbishop who wrote it, were presently apprehended and sent prisoners to the tower.”*

The seven bishops were in a few days arraigned before the bar of the king’s-bench, and indicted of high misdemeanor for having “ falsely, unlawfully, maliciously, seditiously, and scandalously composed and written a false, malicious, pernicious, and seditious libel concerning the king and his royal declaration for liberty of conscience, under the pretence of a petition ; and that they had published the same in the presence of the king.”† The trial lasted nearly eleven hours, and was succeeded by a consultation of the jury which lasted the whole night, when the bishops were declared, *Not guilty* ; to the infinite joy and satisfaction of the surrounding multitudes, who filled the air with shouts and acclamations.

This victory over the despotic monarch, whose conduct had incurred the detestation of his subjects, was celebrated by illuminations and public rejoicings in every part of the nation. The king, being with the army, encamped as usual for several summers on Hounslow Heath, was suddenly alarmed with the

* Welwood, p. 209.—Kennet, vol. iii. p. 483. + Welwood, n. 210.

appearance of a general tumult among the soldiers, accompanied with wild and extravagant demonstrations of joy. Upon inquiring the cause of the earl of Feversham, he was informed, that it was nothing but the rejoicings of the soldiers for the acquittance of the bishops.—“Do you call that nothing?” said the king. “But so much the worse for them.” Whatever his malignant revenge might at the moment have suggested, subsequent circumstances happily did not allow him to execute his designs.*

The great affairs of the nation were approaching towards a crisis. This was the time for all denominations of protestants to forget their former animosities, and, instead of robbing and destroying one another, to unite all their strength against their common enemy, which was popery and spiritual despotism. At this juncture it was, that the noble principles of English liberty began to be re-kindled, notwithstanding all the attempts for many years to extinguish them.†

A friendly union of churchmen and nonconformists seemed at this crisis indispensably necessary. There was but little prospect of either party existing long without the aid of the other; but by unanimity and zealous co-operation they might save the nation from impending ruin. To promote this desirable and happy temper, the marquis of Halifax, a most accomplished statesman, published a piece, at the request of some of the principal dignitaries of the church, entitled, “A Letter to a Dissenter upon occasion of his Majesty’s late gracious Declaration of Indulgence;” in which he recommended those who had been so long and so severely used, and were on a sudden restored to favour, to consider the cause they had to suspect their new friends, and the duty incumbent upon them, from prudence and Christianity, not to endanger the public safety by the desire of ease, nor yet by the revenge of their former enemies. “The church of Rome,” says he, “not only dislikes your liberty, but, by its principles, cannot allow it. They are not able to make good their vows; nay, it would be a habit of sin requiring absolution. You are, therefore, now fondly embraced only, that you may be the more effectually squeezed afterwards. To come so quick from one extreme to

* Belsham, vol. p. 69.

† Welwood, p. 214.

another is so unnatural a motion, that you ought to be on your guard: the other day you were sons of Belial; now you are angels of light. Popery is now the only friend of liberty, and the known enemy to persecution! We have been under shameful mistakes if this can be either true or lasting.—You have formerly very justly blamed the church of England for going too far in her compliance with the court; conclude therefore, that you must break off your friendship, or set no bounds to it. The church is now convinced of its error, in being too severe with you. The next parliament will be gentle to you. The next heir is bred in a country famous for indulgence. There is a general agreement of thinking men, that we must no more cut ourselves off from foreign protestants, but enlarge our foundations; so that all things conspire to give you ease and satisfaction, if you do not too much anticipate it. If protestants of all sorts have been to blame in their behaviour to each other, they are upon equal terms, and for that very reason ought now to be reconciled.”

This was excellent advice; and the dissenters in general had the wisdom to observe it. They entered into no alliance with the catholics, nor complied with the measures of the court, only so far as to accept their liberty, to which they had an equal right as to the air they breathed. They could not persuade themselves that their new friends had any true affection for them; or that there could be any firm alliance between the claim of liberty and infallibility; and it was impossible to see how popery could be the friend of liberty, and the enemy of persecution. Their conviction was increased by seeing the protestants so unmercifully persecuted in France, at the very moment they were so much courted and caressed in England. They were far from admiring the instruments of their present liberty: but the more maturely they considered their circumstances, the more their suspicions increased, and the less they felt inclined to listen to those who preached up anger and vengeance against the church of England, which they were sure was very much out of season. They did not wait for a parliamentary security of their liberty, of which the marquis seemed desirous; yet they were entitled to that gentle and friendly construction which that great man was inclined to put upon their proceedings; and it would have been matter of unspeak-

able joy to them, to have found his words made good in the sequel: "That the common danger had so laid open the mistake of the church party, that all their former haughtiness towards the dissenters was for ever extinguished; and that it had turned the spirit of persecution, into the spirit of peace, charity, and condescension."*

The church of England now opened her eyes, though too late, and saw that she had been labouring for her own destruction, by openly propagating the fallacious doctrine of passive obedience. This doctrine had for a long time been carefully inculcated, as an essential doctrine of the church; and, as no bound had been affixed to it, the people did not conceive how it was possible, with a safe conscience, to refuse unlimited obedience to the sovereign. Painful experience convinced men of good sense and sound policy, that unless the royal prerogative was bounded, both church and state would sink in ruin. Churchmen now retracted their former errors, which had given occasion to the present danger. Their first and most necessary precaution was to form such a bond of union with the nonconformists, as would afford common security. This union was become more easy than ever. The two parties agreed that their division had been the sole cause of their ruin; and this was a powerful inducement to their friendly union. Churchmen discovered a readiness to comply with the scruples of the nonconformists, and to leave every man at full liberty in matters of ceremony. The leading men on both sides took great pains to curb the passionate, and those whose views were contracted. These prudent and generous endeavours, to the amazement of all Christians, produced at length a uniformity of sentiment upon the grand question, viz. "That it was absolutely necessary to think of means for the preservation of religion and the state, from the impending danger."†

An event peculiarly propitious now transpired, which greatly contributed to raise the sinking spirits of the nation, and which was occasioned by the forward zeal of the courtiers, though contrary to their intentions. While the project was under consideration to take off the penal and test laws, and all true protestants were in a state of the utmost consternation,

* Calamy's Contin. vol. i. Ded.

† Rapin, vol. ii. p. 770

the ill fate of king James prompted him to try the inclinations of the prince and princess of Orange. These royal personages, the latter of whom was the king's daughter, had beheld with extreme regret all the illegal and unpolitic measures of England, but were unwilling to publish their private opinions, since they knew it would be displeasing to king James. To know their highnesses opinion upon the dispensing power and the absolute prerogative of the crown, was at this crisis particularly desired by all the protestants in the kingdom; but there appeared no possible method of obtaining this knowledge, if the king had not procured it for them.

The king supposed it would greatly contribute to his own interest, to find out by some means or other the private sentiments of the prince and princess; which, if conformable to his own, were to be published, but if otherwise, to be concealed. The result of this inquiry, which was extremely dissatisfactory to James, is thus expressed: "That it was the prince and princess' opinion, that no Christian ought to be persecuted for his conscience, or be ill used because he differs from the public and established religion. That they consent that the papists in England, Scotland, and Ireland be suffered to continue in their religion, with as much liberty as is allowed them by the States of Holland; in which it cannot be denied that they enjoy a full liberty of conscience. As to the dissenters, their highnesses not only consent, but heartily approve, of their having an entire liberty for the full exercise of their religion; and that they are ready to concur in settling and confirming this liberty, and will protect and defend it. If his majesty desire their concurrence in repealing the penal laws, their highnesses are ready to give it, provided those laws continue still in force to keep Roman catholics out of both houses of parliament, and out of all public employments, ecclesiastical, civil, and military."*

These open avowals of the prince and princess were extremely obnoxious to the king; and their being divulged among the people awakened his tyrannical resentment, but inspired all English protestants with confidence and joy. While the king was trampling on the laws, the religion, and the liberties of his

* Welwood, p. 218.

subjects, many of the leading churchmen, spiritual as well as temporal, carried on a secret correspondence with the prince of Orange, and invited him to the deliverance of England from its present perilous circumstances, since in him alone all their hopes were placed. At the same time, every means was used to secure the favour and co-operation of the dissenters.* Bishop Lloyd ventured to acquaint Mr. Owen, the dissenting minister at Oswestry, with the secret of the prince's invitation from himself and others; and he freely expressed his hope that the dissenters would readily concur in promoting the common interest of the nation. "You and we," said the bishop, "are brethren. We have, indeed, been angry brethren; but we have seen our folly, and are resolved, if we ever have it in our power, to show that we will treat you as brethren."† The dissenters received the most positive assurances, that, in case they stood firm in the cause, such as could should in a better time be comprehended within the pale of the church, and the rest enjoy toleration.‡

While, at this particular juncture, the eyes of all true protestants were fixed upon Holland, for the redemption of their country, the church of England presented a most interesting memorial to the prince and princess of Orange, which is here recited:

"Your royal highnesses cannot be ignorant that the protestants of England, who continue true to their religion and government established by law, have been many ways troubled and vexed by restless contrivances and designs of papists, under pretence of the royal authority, and things required of them unaccountable before God and man. Ecclesiastical benefits and preferments have been taken from them, without any other reason than the king's pleasure. They have been summoned and sentenced by ecclesiastical commissioners, contrary to law, and deprived of their birthright in the free choice of their magistrates and representatives. Divers corporations have been dissolved; the legal security of our religion and liberty, established and ratified by king and parliament, annulled and overthrown by a pretended dispensing power. New

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 640.

† Calamy's Contin. vol. i. Ded.

‡ Burnet, vol. i. p. 708.

and unheard-of maxims have been preached, as if subjects had no right but what depends on the king's will and pleasure. The militia have been put into the hands of persons not qualified by law, and a popish, mercenary army maintained in the kingdom in time of peace, absolutely contrary to the law. The execution of the law against several high crimes and misdemeanors has been superseded and prohibited. The statutes against correspondence with the court of Rome, papal jurisdiction, and popish priests, have been suspended.

“ In the courts of justice, those judges are displaced who dare acquit those whom the king would have condemned ; as happened to the judges Powel and Holloway, for acquitting the seven bishops. Liberty of choosing members of parliament, notwithstanding all the care taken, and provision made by law in that behalf, is wholly taken away, *quo warranto* served against corporations, and the three known questions. All things are carried on in open view for the propagation and growth of popery ; for which the courts of England and France have so long jointly laboured with so much application and earnestness. They have endeavoured to persuade your royal highnesses to liberty of conscience, and abrogating the penal laws and tests, wherein they fell short of their aim.

“ They most humbly implore the protection of your royal highnesses, as to the suspending and encroachments made upon the law, for the maintenance of the protestant religion, our civil and fundamental rights and privileges : And that your royal highnesses would be pleased to insist, that the free parliament of England, according to law, may be restored ; that the laws against papists, priests, and papal jurisdiction, may be put in execution, and the suspending and dispensing power declared null and void ; that the rights and privileges of the city of London, the free choice of their magistrates, and the liberties as well of that as of other corporations restored, and all things returned to their ancient channel.”*

The king's arbitrary government, and his design to establish popery and slavery, had awakened in the prince a lively concern for our religion and our liberties, long before he received this memorable invitation from the church of England ; particularly an attempt to impose a pretended heir to the crown,

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 488.

and to deprive the prince and princess of their right of succession. Every transpiring event rendered the king's affairs continually more critical and perilous ; and at length he issued writs for a new parliament, declaring, " that he would endeavour to obtain a legal establishment of a universal toleration, and inviolably preserve the church of England in possession of the several acts of uniformity, as far as they were consistent with such toleration ; and, to quiet the minds of his protestant subjects, he was content that the Roman catholics should remain incapable of being members of the house of commons, that so the legislature might continue in the hands of protestants."

Within two days after this proclamation, the king received a letter from his minister at the Hague, giving him the fullest assurance, that the prince of Orange was preparing to invade England with a powerful force by sea and land. With this news his majesty was thunderstruck ; he turned pale and speechless, and the letter dropped from his hands. His eyes were now opened to see himself on the brink of a precipice, which his own delusions had hitherto concealed from him. Like a man distracted, he turned himself every way for relief, but could resolve upon nothing. His ministers and counselors, in equal consternation as himself, saw no remedy but a precipitate retraction of his former measures. He deferred the meeting of the parliament, and applied to the bishops then in town to know what would make the church of England easy. They advised him to annul the ecclesiastical commission, and the dispensing power ; to recall all licenses and faculties to papists to teach school ; to prohibit the four apostolical vicars from invading the ecclesiastical jurisdiction ; to fill the vacant bishoprics ; to restore the charters ; and to call a free parliament by which the church might be secured according to the act of uniformity, and provision might be made for due liberty of conscience. These things were hard of digestion in the stomach of a king, who thought every thing ought to give way to his sovereign will and pleasure. But to insist upon his prerogative was now unseasonable ; so he began reluctantly to retrace his steps ; concluding, that if he could only satisfy the bishops, and recover the affections of the church, his affairs might still do well. But it was too late.*

* Echard, p. 1112.—Warner, vol. ii. p. 645.

Under these wild distractions of mind, the king received an address from his Scotch bishops, loaded with fulsome eulogium on his character, but their eulogium, at this crisis, was of no avail. "We magnify the divine mercy in blessing your majesty with a son, and us with a prince, whom we pray heaven may bless and preserve to inherit, with your dominions, the illustrious and heroic virtues of his august and most serene parents. We are amazed to hear of the danger of an invasion from Holland, which excites our prayers to God to give success to your majesty's arms, that all who disturb the peace of your realms may be clothed with shame, and that you may have the hearts of your subjects, and the necks of your enemies."*

In this desperate emergency, the king rescinded some of those illegal and unpopular measures which had excited the present alarming spirit of disaffection and revolt. These symptoms, not of remorse, but of terror, did not prevent the prince of Orange's sailing from the Texel, November 1, 1688, with a fleet of five hundred transports, having a large body of land forces on board, under the convoy of a strong squadron of ships of war. A superior English fleet, which lay at anchor at the Nore, were prevented putting to sea by a violent east wind, which carried the Dutch fleet into Torbay on the 4th of November; and on the day following the prince of Orange landed his troops without the loss of a man.

The prince having advanced with his army towards Exeter, was soon joined by great numbers of the nobility and gentry of the western counties. From the first intelligence of his arrival, every part of the kingdom was in commotion; and associations were daily formed in his favour. The nobility and gentry about Exeter entered into this solemn bond of union:—"We do engage to Almighty God, and to his highness the prince of Orange, and with one another, to stand firm to this cause, and to one another, in defence of it, and never to depart from it, until our religion, laws, and liberties are so far secured to us in a free parliament, that they shall be no more in danger of falling under popery and slavery."† Similar measures were adopted in other parts of the kingdom.

The gentlemen of the western counties having joined the

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. ii. p. 742.

† Kennet, vol. iii. p. 496.

prince, he received them in a body, and said—"We are come according to your invitation and our promise. Our duty to God obliges us to protect the Protestant Religion; and our love to mankind, your liberties and properties. Though we have brought both a good fleet and a good army, to render these kingdoms happy; by rescuing all protestants from popery, and slavery, and arbitrary power; by restoring them to their rights and properties established by law; and by promoting peace and trade, which is the soul of government, and the very life and blood of a nation; yet we rely more on the goodness of God, and the justice of our cause, than on any human force and power whatever. We bid you and all your followers most heartily welcome. Let the whole world judge if our pretensions are not just, generous, sincere, and above price; since we might have even a bridge of gold to return back: but it is our principle and resolution to die in a good cause, rather than live in a bad one; well knowing that true virtue and honour is its own reward, and the happiness of mankind our great and only design."*

The northern counties openly espoused his cause, and resistance was no where suspected. The king repaired to his army near Salisbury; but finding that no dependence could be placed on its fidelity, and that it was rapidly diminishing by desertion, he retreated to Andover; from which place prince George of Denmark, who had hitherto attended the king, repaired to the head quarters of the prince of Orange. Upon the king's arrival in London, he had the inexpressible mortification to learn that his daughter, princess Anne of Denmark, had withdrawn from the court, and placed herself under the protection of the invading army.

The prince brought with him a declaration, dated October 10th, which contained an enumeration of the public grievances, concerning religion and civil government; the fruitless attempts which had been made to obtain a redress of those grievances; and a protestation that his expedition was intended only to procure a free and lawful parliament, to which the prince would refer the redress of grievances; and for making such laws as would establish a good agreement between the

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 496.

church of England and all protestant dissenters ; also for securing to all, who would live peaceably under the government, freedom from persecution on account of their religion, without excepting even Roman catholics. To obtain all this, the prince further declared, “ that he was most earnestly solicited by a great many lords, spiritual and temporal, and by many gentlemen, and other subjects of all ranks.”*

The king having evidently relied too much on the pretended unlimited obedience of the clergy, and being surprised at the lords *spiritual* uniting in the invitation of the prince, immediately sent for the bishops then in London, and insisted not only upon their disowning the fact, but also upon their signing a paper, expressing their abhorrence of the invasion ; but they excused themselves with a general profession of their allegiance and duty. The church party showed so warm an approbation of the prince’s expedition, and spoke so openly in favour of it, as awakened the surprise of many both at the time and afterwards.†

The prince’s army received considerable accessions daily, and was now triumphantly approaching the metropolis. The king not knowing whither to flee for safety, and overwhelmed with dejection and dismay, at length retired to Rochester ; and having lingered there a few days, on the last day of December, he embarked for France, where the queen and the infant prince of Wales were already arrived.

The very same day on which the king departed from London, the prince of Orange took possession of St. James’s. Having received numerous congratulations from all quarters, he summoned an assembly consisting of all the nobles, prelates, and gentlemen who had sat in any parliament during the reign of Charles II. ; and, by their advice, he issued circular addresses to all the counties and boroughs throughout the kingdom, to elect a convention of the estates of the realm in the form of a parliament ; which, accordingly, assembled January 22, 1689, and after a long and interesting debate, they declared the throne of England *VACANT* ; and by a decisive majority of voices *conferred* the crown, now at the disposal of the nation, upon the prince and princess of Orange, as the just re-

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 493.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 764.

ward of that patriotism and valour by which the country was rescued from slavery and ruin.*

Thus was accomplished, nearly without the least bloodshed, one of the most wonderful and glorious events that England ever witnessed—that event which then received, and will ever receive, the warmest applause of all the true friends of their country. Upon the prince's arrival at the royal palace, all classes of people came to welcome him. The bishops, with the exception of the archbishop, waited upon him the next day. The London clergy came next. The city of London, and many other bodies, waited upon him, and expressed their joy and exultation for their common deliverance. Serjeant Maynard, nearly ninety years of age, at the head of his brethren of the law, attended with their affectionate congratulations: the prince taking notice of his great age, and saying he had outlived all the men of the law, he replied, “that he had outlived the law itself, if his highness had not interfered.”†

This wonderful revolution presents, from the plainest historical facts, a true picture of the instability of man. It will amaze all posterity to read the history of the clergy on this occasion; who had almost to a man, for upwards of twenty years, preached the doctrine of unlimited obedience, and assured both king Charles and king James by numberless addresses, that their lives and fortunes were absolutely at their service; but they were among the first and most zealous in rejecting their natural prince, and in placing a foreigner on the throne! The famous university of Oxford had, by a solemn decree, declared all manner of resistance to be “impious, seditious, heretical, blasphemous, and damnable;” but the heads of colleges, tired of their errors and their king, when it comported with their interest, sent their agent to the prince of Orange as he marched through the country, assuring him of their firm attachment to his cause; and, inviting him to Oxford, they declared that their plate was at his service. This, says my author, was a sudden turn from those principles which they had carried so high only a few years before.‡ Notwithstanding their former opinions and professions, as soon as their *jure divino* king had invaded the properties of the university,

* Echard, p. 1137.

† Burnet, vol. i. p. 803.

‡ Ibid. p. 793.

and threatened to pull down the fences of their ecclesiastical preferments, they invited a foreign prince with an armed force to rescue them out of his hands, even while their own sovereign was on the throne.

A writer, who lived in these times, thus remarks upon their doctrine and practice. Was king James treated like a man that could do no wrong, and was not accountable? Let those who blame others for the inconsistency of their principles, reconcile the doctrine of passive obedience, nonresistance, and the king's not being accountable, to the practice of churchmen at the period of the revolution. The church of England is bound to show it, in order to justify her own conduct in dethroning the late king, and it is a double satire upon the church to pretend to vindicate it; since it is impossible to reconcile the principle of passive obedience, with the whole proceeding of the revolution. If the doctrine be true, that *the king can do no wrong*, if it be unlawful to resist his power in any case whatever, or to take up arms in defence of liberty, law, religion, or property, however oppressed or endangered, the following are some of the most inevitable consequences: all the nobility, gentry, clergy, and commons of England, who either invited or joined the prince of Orange, and afterwards consented to his being made king; all who swore to him when he was made king, or have since concurred in the new establishments, are perjured rebels: the crime, in this case, ought never to be forgotten, nor without repentance will it ever be forgiven. If the people of England were in the right, if the depredations made on the rights of the nation, were a just foundation for suspending the general allegiance, and applying to a foreign prince, for the redress of national grievances: if the English nation had both reason and right to oblige the king to give the laws their course, and to let every man enjoy his property: in a word, if the present establishment by the revolution be founded in justice, law, and reason, then the English have done no wrong, and the argument is good, that kings are not kings *jure divino*; and that when they break the laws, trample on property, affront religion, and invade the liberties of the nation, they may be opposed and resisted by force.*

* Biog. Britan. vol. v, p. 60.

The state of religion during this short reign could not be expected to undergo any very material alteration. There was certainly a violent contention with popery, and the catholics were more zealous and open in the profession of their religion ; but while many proved themselves better protestants, they did not become much better Christians. Few there were who turned to a stricter life ; and the clergy were not more diligent in their pastoral labours, who are represented as being the most remiss in Christendom.* In short, the nation being brought into perilous circumstances, was in imminent danger of losing its religion, its liberty, its property, and of returning to its former state of barbarism and wretchedness.

By the expedition of the prince of Orange, a revolution was accomplished, which must be acknowledged one of the most interesting and important in the history of our country. From this period, a government was established upon a basis which secured to all subjects a larger share of the natural and unalienable rights of mankind ; and from this period the grand question, whether the government ought to be exercised for the advantage of the governors or the governed, was finally decided. Government was allowed and virtually asserted by the highest authority, to be a *trust* for the benefit of the whole. The inference, therefore, deduced from this principle cannot with any degree of plausibility be disputed, that the men in whom this trust is vested, by whatever names or titles they may be distinguished, ARE ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE TO THE COMMUNITY FOR THE PROPER EXERCISE OF THEIR PREROGATIVE.

* Burnet, vol. i. p. 688.

CHAPTER III.

THE REIGN OF KING WILLIAM AND QUEEN MARY.



SECTION I.

The Revolution promotes Religious Toleration.

THE reformation and the revolution are the two grand eras in the annals of our country, which have been applauded by innumerable political writers as productive of consummate freedom. The former of these events was, originally, more the result of interested policy, than of honest zeal to restore primitive Christianity; which could be preserved only so long as the church stood unconnected with the civil power. A reformation grounded on these Christian principles could hardly be expected when the nation was only just emerging from popery; an event so propitious could scarcely enter the minds of those in power, much less would it have suited the political designs of the English court. The intention of king Henry VIII. was to gratify his resentment against the Roman pontiff, to enrich his coffers with the spoils of the clergy, and to render his power absolutely despotic by the unnatural union of the ecclesiastic with the civil sword. These pernicious views were too strictly followed by his successors; and the government of the church, instead of being modelled according to the Christian code, and on a plan to preserve unrestricted Christian freedom, was employed as the great engine of the civil power; the spiritual kingdom of Christ was made a subordinate limb of the political prerogative; and the regular Christian pastors became the professed creatures of a worldly government.

The revolution, it must be owned, gave a different aspect to the constitution from what it had assumed through the suc-

cessive despotism of the Tudors and the Stuarts. The maxim of hereditary indefeasible right, which, by the assistance of the church, they had established, was now publicly renounced as erroneous; the power of the crown was acknowledged to flow from no other fountain than that of a contract with the people; allegiance and protection were declared reciprocal terms. If the doctrine of passive obedience and nonresistance were true, the revolution was open rebellion, and the present family on the throne must be usurpers. These are facts detailed at length on the faithful page of history.

Few princes have acted so conspicuous or so honourable a part on the great theatre of the world, as king WILLIAM. Scarcely had he attained the age of man, when he was called upon by the united voice of his countrymen to rescue them from the dangers of an invasion which had nearly subverted the Dutch republic. When their apprehensions had reduced them to the lowest ebb of despondency, he awakened the drooping genius of the commonwealth; and Holland, under the auspices of a prince of the house of Orange, presently re-assumed her courage and re-established her power. When these nations were threatened with popery and slavery, the assistance of this renowned prince was again invoked; and, having accomplished with unparalleled success the glorious and immortal work of their deliverance, he was rewarded with the crown which fell from the head of the worthless tyrant.

The flight of James, and the establishment of William on the throne of England, impress the reflecting reader with admiration and gratitude for the dispensations of that Providence, which overrules even the vices of individuals for the general felicity, and deduces from a train of circumstances, apparently unpropitious to the progress of national freedom and happiness, the most important and most favourable results. It is to that intemperance of spirit and that bigotry of principle which threatened our religion with continued persecution, and our liberties with extinction, that we are indebted for the establishment of our constitution on a durable basis, and for the rational enjoyment of our rights as members of one great community.*

* Clarke's Hist. of Eng. vol. iii. p. 1.

The change so happily accomplished by the revolution, inspired the nation with fresh confidence, and all the friends of liberty naturally looked with anxiety for the fulfilment of the fair promises and assurances so lately made. Whatever king William had promised on this head, he was desirous to perform. Trained during his early years in a private station, and mixing with the various classes of society, he was better instructed in the knowledge of human nature than usually falls to the lot of those who are born in a palace, and educated for a throne. It was a signal advantage to him, that from his childhood he had beheld different religious sects living together in harmony, and performing the various duties which they owed to each other and to society, with as much good will as if all had belonged to the same religious communion. Those who live in a country where all are required to be of one religious creed, labour under an almost insuperable disadvantage, and are prone to think of other denominations of Christians with jealousy or contempt, as if they belonged to some inferior and despicable race of mortals. Many persons of good natural abilities, and dispositions, and even of cultivated minds, through the infatuation of ignorance or prejudice, depreciate all who do not hold their creed and worship God according to their forms, as if they were very little superior to the brutes, and scarcely fit to live. When this happens to be the baneful impression on the minds of princes, and men of influence in society, the effects are exceedingly to be deplored. From such blindness and bigotry the mind of king William was entirely free. He had a liberality of soul, and a friendliness of disposition to secure to different religious denominations the rights of conscience and of worship, which none of the crowned heads of England had possessed. Sensible, therefore, of the importance of uniting all classes of English protestants, he was no sooner fixed on the throne, than he endeavoured to carry into execution his grand design of complete religious emancipation.

This was a favourable season for the reconciliation of all religious parties. The most eminent bishops and clergy had publicly declared to king James, their readiness to enter into a friendly union with the dissenters; and, upon the settlement of king William, they gave similar assurances of their good-

will towards them. There was, at the same time, an equally amicable disposition in the great body of dissenters, who embraced the earliest opportunity of openly signifying their desires of a friendly accommodation. William and Mary were no sooner seated on the throne, than the dissenting ministers in and about London, to the number of ninety or upwards, waited on their majesties with an address of congratulation, which the venerable Dr. Bates delivered to the king and queen, addressing the former as follows :

“ May it please your majesty—The series of successful events which has attended your glorious enterprize, for the saving of these kingdoms from so imminent and destructive evils, has been so eminent and extraordinary, that it may force an acknowledgment of the divine Providence from those who deny it, and raises admiration in all who believe and reverence it. The beauty and speed of this happy work are the bright signatures of his hand, who creates deliverance for his people. The less of human power, the more of the divine wisdom and goodness has been conspicuous in it. If the deliverance had been obtained by fierce and bloody battles, victory itself had been dejected and sad, and our joy had been mixed with afflicting bitterness : but as the sun, ascending the horizon, dispels without noise the darkness of the night ; so your serene presence has, without tumults and disorders, chased away the darkness that invaded us.

“ In the sense of this astonishing deliverance, we desire, with all possible ardency of affection, to magnify the glorious name of God the author of it, by whose entire efficacy the means have been successful : and we cannot, without a warm rapture of thankfulness, recount our obligations to your majesty the happy instrument of it. Your illustrious greatness of mind in an undertaking of such vast expense ; your heroic zeal in exposing your most precious life in such an adventurous expedition ; your wise conduct and unshaken resolution in prosecuting your great ends, are above the loftiest flights of language, and exceed all praise. We owe to your majesty the two greatest and most valuable blessings that we can enjoy ; the preservation of the true religion, our most sacred treasure ; and the recovery of the falling state, and the establishing it upon just foundations. According to our duty, we promise

unfeigned fidelity and true allegiance to your majesty's person and government.

“ We are encouraged by your gracious promise upon our first address, humbly to desire and hope, that your majesty will be pleased, by your wisdom and authority, to establish a firm union of your protestant subjects in the matters of religion, by making *the rule of Christianity to be the rule of conformity*. Our blessed union in the peace and purity of the Gospel, will make this church a fair and lovely type of heaven, and terrible to our anti-christian enemies. This will make England the steady centre from whence a powerful influence will be derived for the support of reformed Christianity abroad: this will bring immortal honour to your name, above the trophies and triumphs of the most renowned conquerors. We do assure your majesty, that we shall cordially embrace the terms of union, which the ruling wisdom of our Saviour has prescribed in his word. We shall not trespass farther on your royal patience, but shall offer up our fervent prayers to the King of kings, that he will please to direct your majesty by his unerring wisdom, and always incline your heart to his glory, and encompass your sacred person with his favour as with a shield; and make your government a universal blessing to these kingdoms.”

His majesty was graciously pleased to make this reply—“ I take kindly your good wishes; and whatever is in my power shall be employed for obtaining such a union among you. I do assure you of my protection and kindness.” To the queen, the doctor spoke as follows :

“ May it please your majesty—Your happy arrival in your native country, and accession to the crown, have diffused a universal joy through this kingdom. It is an auspicious sign of public felicity, when supreme virtue, and supreme dignity meet in the same person. Your inviolable firmness in the profession of the truth, and exemplary piety, are the most radiant jewels in your crown: the lustre of your conversation, unstained in the midst of tempting vanities, and adorned with every grace, recommends religion as the most honourable and amiable quality, even to those who are averse from hearing sermons, and apt to despise serious instructions and excitations to be religious. We humbly desire your majesty will be pleas-

ed by your wisdom and goodness, to compose the differences between your protestant subjects in things of less moment concerning religion. We hope those reverend persons who conspire with us in the main end, the glory of God and the public good, will consent to the terms of union, wherein all the reformed churches agree. We shall sincerely address our requests to God, that he will please to pour down, in rich abundance, his blessings upon your majesty's person and government, and preserve you to his heavenly kingdom."

To this address, her majesty was graciously pleased to reply in these words:—"I will use all endeavours for obtaining a union, that is necessary for the edifying of the church. I desire your prayers."*

These eloquent addresses, and the royal answers, contain the grand and fundamental basis of the revolution, so far as concerned religion and the church of God. The desired union of all denominations of Christians is here correctly stated, and is such as the *ruling wisdom of our Saviour has prescribed*; which certainly is not the same kind of union as that which is prescribed by the wisdom of this world, for the purpose of worldly policy, and by severe coercive edicts. This Christian union is founded on the liberal basis of the Gospel, which king William informed these protestant divines he would employ his utmost power to obtain. This, as we shall perceive in the sequel, could not fail to alarm those persons whose religion was derived from tradition, and founded only on secularity or persecution.

In consequence of the changes produced by the revolution, a considerable number of offices, civil and military, became vacant, and required proper persons to fill them. It was king William's constant endeavour to call into public service the talents of *all* his protestant subjects without exception; and his liberal mind was fully convinced that this was founded in policy, justice, and Christianity. Upon this subject he thus expressed his sentiments to both houses of parliament:

"God has been pleased to make me instrumental to redeem you from the ills which you feared; and it is still my desire, as well as my duty, to serve you in your religion, laws, and

liberties, which was the only inducement that brought me into England; and to these I ascribe the blessings that have attended this undertaking.—I shall now put you in mind of one thing, which will conduce much to our settlement, as a settlement will to the disappointment of our enemies. I am, with all the expedition I can, filling the vacancies in offices and places of trust, occasioned by this late revolution. I hope you are sensible, that there is a necessity of some law to settle the oaths to be taken by all persons to be admitted to such places: I recommend it to your care to make a speedy provision for it. And, as I doubt not that you will sufficiently provide *against papists*, so I hope you will leave room for the admission of *all protestants*, who are willing and able to serve. This conjunction in my service will tend to the better uniting you amongst yourselves, and the strengthening of you against your common adversaries.”*

No prince ever ascended a throne on more politic, or more Christian principles. The king opposed the prostitution of the Lord's supper as a necessary qualification for a secular office. He incorporated this honourable sentiment in his speech, without the knowledge of his ministers.† But for the better understanding the royal intentions, it must be remembered, says bishop Kennet, “that the archbishop and bishops, with many of the clergy, had been so addicted to the high notions of passive obedience, nonresistance, and the divine right of an hereditary monarchy, that they knew not how to reconcile the revolution to those bigoted principles.” They had earnestly desired the prince's coming to their assistance, and the chief of them presented their adulatory addresses after he had accepted the crown; yet, with the height of absurdity, some of them “did not care to pay any allegiance to him, nor to renounce their obligations to king James.” The king, therefore, showed great favour to the dissenters, whom he considered as the best affected to his person, title, and government.‡

That his majesty's disposition did not incline him to intolerance and persecution was sufficiently evinced on his taking the Scotch coronation oath. For on the reading of the clause

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 517, 518.

† Burnet, vol. ii. p. 8.

‡ Kennet, vol. iii. p. 518.

by which he engaged to root out all heresy, he at once demonstrated his mild disposition, and his regard to the sacredness of an oath, by qualifying his assent with a protestation against being obliged to become a persecutor, of which he required those around him to take particular notice.*

The king's desire to promote union among all his protestant subjects being fully stated to his two houses, occasioned the introduction of a bill into the upper house, containing a clause for taking away the necessity of receiving the sacrament, to make a man capable of enjoying a lucrative office. The bill also proposed to abrogate the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, and to appoint other oaths, more agreeable to Christian freedom and the views of the best protestants. But on this memorable occasion the king's enlightened and amiable policy was upwards of a century in advance before the guardians of the nation; for the clause being reported to the house, was rejected by a large majority, who imagined the government more secure in the hands of one religious sect, to the exclusion of all others. Seven peers entered their firm protest against it, grounded on the following reasons: "That a hearty union among protestants, was a greater security both to church and state, than any test that could be invented. That an obligation to receive the sacrament in churches, was now a test on the protestants, rather than on the papists; and, as long as it so continued, there could not be that hearty and perfect union among protestants, which had been always wished, and was at this time indispensably necessary. That greater caution ought not to be required of such as were admitted into offices, than of the members of the two houses of parliament, who were not obliged to receive the sacrament, to enable them to sit in either house."†

Unable to attain an object so exceedingly desirable, his majesty's ministers resolved to make a second trial; and, perceiving they could not prevail in their generous attempts to set aside the sacramental test, they introduced another clause, which provided that a person should be sufficiently qualified for any office, employment, or place of trust, who a year before or after his admission, did receive the sacrament of the

* Brown, p. 162.

† Kennet, vol. iii. p. 518.

Lord's supper, either according to the usage of the church of England, or in any other protestant congregation ; and could produce a certificate, under the hands of the minister, and two other credible persons, members of such protestant congregation. But this, remarkable as it may appear, shared the same fate as the former, being rejected by a great majority of the same protestant assembly !

This liberal motion being lost, six of the lords who were so exceedingly strenuous for it, recorded their dissent on these important grounds:—"Because it gives a great part of the protestant freedom of England, reason to complain of inequality and hard usage, when they are excluded from political employments by law : and it deprives the king and country of men capable of serving the public interest, for a mere scruple of conscience, which can by no means render them suspected, much less disaffected to the government.—Because his majesty, as the common and indulgent father of his people, having expressed an earnest desire of liberty to the tender consciences of all his protestant subjects, and divers of my lords the bishops having on several occasions professed an inclination to, and owned the reasonableness of, such a Christian temper ; we apprehend it will raise suspicion in some persons' minds, that it is something else, and not the care of religion or a design to heal our breaches, when they find, that by confining secular employments to ecclesiastical conformity, those are shut out from civil offices whose doctrine and worship may be tolerated by act of parliament.—Because, to set marks of distinction and humiliation on any kind of men, who have not rendered themselves suspected to the government, as it is at all times to be avoided by the makers of just and equitable laws, so it may be particularly hurtful to the reformed interest at home and abroad, especially at this present juncture, which stands in need of the united hands and hearts of all protestants, against the secret designs and open attempts of a restless party, and a potent neighbour (France) who is more zealous than Rome itself to plant popery in these kingdoms, and labours with the utmost force to settle his tyranny upon the ruins of the Reformation throughout Europe.—Because it turns the edge of a law, we know not by what fate, upon protestants and friends to the government, which was intended to exclude papists from places

of trust, as men avowedly dangerous to our religion and government: and thus the receiving of the sacrament, which was enjoined as a means to discover papists, is now made so distinguishing a duty among protestants, as to *weaken the whole by cutting off a part*.—Because mysteries of religion and divine worship are of divine origin, and of a nature so perfectly distinct from the secular affairs of political society, that they cannot be applied to those ends; therefore the church, according to the precepts of the Gospel, as well as common prudence, ought to take care neither to offend the tender consciences of its own members, nor give offence to those who are without, by mixing their sacred mysteries with secular interests.—Because we cannot see how it can consist with the law of God, common equity, or the right of any free-born subject, that any one be punished without crime. If it be a crime not to receive the sacrament according to the usage of the church of England, every one who does not receive it ought to be punished for it, which no one will affirm: If it be no crime, those who are capable and judged fit for employments by the king, ought not to be punished with a law of exclusion for not doing that which it is no crime to forbear. If it be still urged as an effectual test to discover and keep out papists, receiving the sacrament in other protestant congregations where they are members and well known, would be at least as effectual to that purpose.”*

We shall not affirm whether the reasons of these enlightened statesmen were unanswerable; nor whether, on this occasion, they proved themselves better theologians than even the bishops, who cast all their weight in the opposite scale, which proved by far the heaviest: nevertheless their open protest displayed the independency of their minds, the philanthropy of their hearts, and the noble stand they made against the degrading principles of exclusion, and encroachment on the rights of the subject. While the sacramental test underwent a discussion in the upper house, a bill for the repeal of the corporation act was before the commons. A petition was at the same time presented to the house, by the common council of the city of London, praying, “That our most gracious king may be freed from all restraints of using his protestant sub-

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 519.

jects indifferently, in his military and civil services, according to their several qualities and abilities, wherewith God Almighty, nature, education, and experience have endowed them; to that very end, that they might be useful to their king and country, and therein serve God in their generation." Upon the triumphant opposition in the house of lords, a similar spirit was infused among the commons; and, upon the proposal of an adjournment of the question, the motion was carried by a majority only of two voices, and so the bill was given up.

Thus foiled in the first noble attempts, the king was obliged to remain deprived of the services of such of his subjects as scrupled conformity to the church of England, and could not, with a good conscience, communicate in the Lord's supper as an indispensable qualification for secular employment. His zeal for the security of their natural and unalienable rights, gave extreme offence to the high party about the court, and created bitter enmity against him, which ceased not with his death. These ill humours existed chiefly in the breasts of rigid ecclesiastics and their followers, who even scrupled not to stigmatize the king and queen as *presbyterians* in their hearts. Their conduct alarmed the zealous episcopalians, who concluded, that Hugonotism was about to inundate and overwhelm the kingdom; so the common hue and cry was, "The church is in danger."*

The tolerant king, notwithstanding the failure of these attempts, did not desert the cause of religious melioration. Not intimidated by frequent repulses, he was urged with greater ardour to promote his just and liberal intentions. Being foiled and disappointed in so many instances, he next brought forwards the famous act of *Toleration*; which was the same in substance as a bill that had been drawn up and laid before the parliament in the reign of Charles II., when the nation was so violently agitated about the *exclusion*, by which a catholic was to have been declared incapable of the English crown. The bill appeared so reasonable, and so necessary to the public welfare, that it does not seem to have met with any considerable opposition, in passing through its different stages in either house; and it received the royal assent on the 24th of

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 7, 8.

May, in the year 1689. Some indeed proposed to give it a limited duration, that the dissenters might be kept upon their good behaviour; and, at the close of the period, they might have it continued, abridged, or annulled, according to their deserts. But more generous sentiments prevailed. The good disposition of the nation at this time, to grant what all parties allowed to be conducive to the public tranquillity, was with great propriety urged as a reason for granting it without a clause, which must have hurt the feelings of those whom the act was designed to protect.

The Act of Toleration is memorable in the ecclesiastical history of England, and forms an epoch in the annals of religious emancipation that will never be obliterated from the recollection of the church of God. It was considered as the *Magna Charta* of all British subjects, who wished to have a religion of their own choice, and to worship God without human control. This statute was entitled, “An act for exempting their majesties’ protestant subjects dissenting from the church of England from the penalties of certain laws.” In conformity to its generous design, this act was expressly intended to afford relief to scrupulous consciences in matters of religion, and to be an effectual means of uniting their majesties’ protestant subjects in interest and affection; after which it enumerated and rescinded many of the penal statutes which had been enacted at different periods since the accession of queen Elizabeth, so far as they related to protestants dissenting from the church of England. This memorable act required them to take the oath of allegiance, to declare their abhorrence of the pretended power of the pope to depose princes, and to subscribe the articles of religion, except the thirty-fourth, thirty-fifth, thirty-sixth, and these words in the twentieth—“The church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith.” Those of the baptist persuasion were exempt from subscribing part of the twenty-seventh article, upon infant baptism. It required the quakers to declare their fidelity to king William and queen Mary; their abhorrence of the pretended papal power; and their firm belief of the doctrine of the Trinity, and that the holy Scriptures were of divine inspiration. Under these conditions, having their places of assembly regularly registered, they were allowed and

protected in the public worship of Almighty God ; but all Roman catholics, and all who denied the doctrine of the Trinity as declared in the articles of religion, were excluded from the least share in the meliorating influence of this act.

That the act of toleration savoured of the spirit of the times, and was very far from securing complete religious emancipation, will probably never be disputed. It released the generality of nonconformists from multiplied disgraceful penalties, and afforded them considerable liberty in the worship of God ; so that it proved a signal advantage to the propagation of religion, and a great honour and blessing to the nation. The benefits of this act were procured by the prayers, tears, sufferings, and conflicts of our fathers, the peculiar circumstances of the nation, and the increasing energies of king William and queen Mary.

After every just encomium is bestowed upon this first charter of religious freedom, it was extremely confused and partial. It by no means repealed all the penal statutes on the subject of religion ; and left the laws against Arians, Socinians and Catholics in full force. It did not abrogate all the disgraceful acts of Elizabeth and James I. which inflicted unmerciful temporal penalties on those who absented themselves from the established worship ; and it is a remarkable fact, that these barbarous statutes, with the numerous train which followed under Charles II., are still in full force against all churchmen who may be found disobedient. To inflict the forfeiture of *twenty pounds a month* upon all churchmen who absent themselves from the public service of the church, would no doubt be considered by many in our day as no very lovely proceeding. This and all the other penal enactments are just as much in force against all disobedient churchmen, as they were the day on which they first took effect, or as the corporation and test acts now are against dissenters, though not quite so strictly executed.

The act of toleration left heresy still subject to the cognizance of the ecclesiastical courts ; left a clergyman convicted of it, to deprivation, degradation, and excommunication ; and a layman to the latter, with all its train of inhumanities. Its operations and benefits were limited to protestant dissenters, without embracing all their denominations. As to those whom

it did comprehend, its beneficial influence was confined. It assumed its exclusive clauses, not only requiring from all who claimed its benefits, the oaths of the government, but exacting of ministers subscription to the doctrinal articles of religion ; and it did not supersede the corporation and test acts, the obloquy and disabilities of which still continue. The toleration did not exonerate dissenters from the impositions and requisitions to contribute to the maintenance of the established religion, though they did not attend on its ministrations. It gave no sanction or permission to the solemnization of marriage in any communion separated from the church.

The word *toleration*, when applied to religion, has indeed no very lovely or pleasant sound ; and the thing signified by it, according to the common acceptation of the term, is founded in absurdity and oppression. What can betray greater absurdity than for any one class of fallible and depraved men to take upon them to tolerate others to believe the Scriptures, to worship God, to practise virtue, to mind the salvation of their souls ? And mark the inevitable consequence of this claim. When any class of men claim the power of *tolerating* others to attend to their religion, they necessarily claim the power of *withholding* this favour : having power to bestow toleration as a *boon*, they certainly have power to withdraw it at *pleasure*, and as matter of *right* ; so that from the very spirit and principle of toleration, men hold their religion by the slender and uncertain tenure of human favour, and according to the sovereign pleasure of those in power.. Toleration, therefore, evidently supposes a power to change religion, as well as to sanction it—to destroy religion, as well as to allow its existence. In addition to all this absurdity, toleration betrays the foulest arrogance and despotism. It encroaches on the rights of mankind, and is founded on antichristian usurpation and oppression. For any man or body of men, whether in England, Scotland, France or Italy, to claim the power of allowing others to believe the Gospel and to worship God, is flagrantly intolerable, the worst pretension of antichrist, and deserving of universal abhorrence.

Since man renders homage to God, and God receives homage from man, toleration presents itself with a twofold aspect. When we speak of presenting our homage to God, and it is

affirmed that any man or body of men may tolerate us to perform our duty to our Creator, it will undoubtedly seem strange, though from custom we have been able to bear it : but when we view the subject in the other light, and consider God as receiving homage from man, then for any body of men on earth to permit or tolerate God to receive our homage, is an expression equally at variance with truth and common sense, as to talk of tolerating the existence of the wind, or the sun in the sky. To tolerate a fellow-servant to obey, implies a toleration of the master to receive his obedience ; and the higher this is carried, the more palpable is its absurdity. So that the Toleration Act might with great propriety have been entitled, “ An Act to *permit* Almighty God to receive the Worship of his Creatures !!!”

One circumstance is certainly very remarkable. Religion is the *only* object of toleration. Englishmen are continually boasting of their *religious* toleration, but we never hear of *classical* toleration, *philosophical* toleration, *mathematical* toleration, nor of innumerable other tolerations which might be mentioned. In our enlightened Christian country, *religion* is the only thing bound in human fetters :—religion is the only thing that is thus insulted and degraded, oppressed and persecuted !

Previous to the act of toleration, England had embraced the reformation from popery almost a hundred and fifty years : but during that protracted period, the toleration by statute of such as held different religious sentiments from the incorporated sect was wholly unknown. From the ascendancy of the long parliament to the restoration, considerable liberty was allowed to the various denominations of protestants, so long as they remained peaceable subjects ; yet there was no legal security of the rights of conscience. This was, therefore, the first legal toleration in England in modern times.

This exemption from gross acts of persecution furnished no cause of gratitude to man ; since it was not an indulgence, or a favour that might in justice have been withheld. It is a vice of no light shade to be *intolerant* ; yet it is no virtue to permit the free exercise of differing modes of worship ; any more than to permit a fellow-subject to live quietly in his own house, and enjoy the fruits of his own industry. All the thanks and

praise was due to God, who had so overruled the great affairs of the nation, as to bring about this most important change.

The act of toleration did not give to any one denomination, the least degree of civil power ; but it secured a considerable share of liberty in the worship of God, and the propagation of religion. It reserved nothing to the discretionary power of the magistrate ; but fixed every thing by express statute ; and left the law of the land to prevent and punish abuses. On the whole, this act ought to be regarded as an acquisition of no ordinary kind, and a great blessing to the church of God.

All the true friends of Christian freedom received this legal toleration with the warmest gratitude. Those who promoted this bill, says Burnet, acted a very disingenuous part. While they studied to recommend themselves by this show of moderation, they set their friends to oppose it ; and those who sincerely and cordially promoted it, were represented as enemies and subverters of the church ! These zealous but treacherous advocates of moderation, were strongly opposed to the allowance of religious freedom ; and it is an incontrovertible fact, that, if they could have had their wishes gratified, the act of toleration would never have passed. Contrary to their high professions of friendship and union during the late common danger, “ the clergy began now to show an implacable hatred to the nonconformists, and seemed to wish for an occasion to renew old severities against them !”^{*} The boon, therefore, given to dissenters by the act of toleration, of which they are at this day so frequently and so warmly reminded, was not given them by the church of England : their *birthright*, not *boon*, was secured to them by the civil constitution, at the moment when the reverend ecclesiastics were influenced by “ implacable hatred,” and anxious “ to renew their old severities.” The toleration act did not at all emanate from the church, but resulted from the unusual circumstances attending a change of monarch, wisely and righteously improved by the new sovereign. It was the *state*, not the church, that became tolerant. This fact cannot be too clearly stated, or too well understood.

Why do men in a protestant country talk of *giving* the boon ? Have Christians of one denomination sufficient power

^{*} Burnet, vol. ii. p. 11.

and authority to prohibit, or to grant to men of other denominations, the use of their understandings and consciences, in the worship of Almighty God? As all quiet and peaceable subjects have a natural claim to all the privileges of the civil constitution; so they have a natural right given them not by man, but by their Creator, to think and believe for themselves, to choose their own religion and to worship God, to the exclusion of human molestation. It is, therefore, equally absurd for men to talk of *giving* the boon, as to talk of giving the light of the sun, the rain from the clouds, or the air we breathe.

Wise and good men of all parties greatly applauded the additional freedom introduced by the act of toleration. It appeared in general suitable to the interest of the nation, as well as to the spirit of the times. It was both unreasonable and absurd to complain of the cruelty of the church of Rome, while similar cruelties were practised among protestants of the church of England. The act was extremely gratifying to the king; who “always thought that conscience was God’s province, and ought not to be imposed upon by mortals.” His experience in Holland taught him to consider religious freedom as one of the wisest, as well as one of the most equitable measures of government; and “he was much troubled to see so much ill humour spreading among the clergy, and, by their means, over a great part of the nation.”*

The right reverend historian now cited, however, was an honourable exception from this general intolerance. By his zealous and worthy efforts to promote a legal toleration, he lost much of his credit among the high party; and, speaking of the measure after it was adopted, he says, “I wish the terms of communion were made larger and easier; but since all is now bound on us by a law, that cannot be repealed but in parliament, there must be a change in the minds both of princes and people before that can be accomplished.—I say not this from any dislike of toleration: I think it is a *right due to all men*. Their thoughts are not in their own power. They must think of things as they appear to them. Their consciences are God’s: he only knows them, and he only can change them.

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 17.

As the authority of parents over their children is antecedent to society, and no law to take it away can be binding; so men are bound antecedently to all society, to follow what appears to them to be the will of God; and every honest man would think himself hardly treated, if he were ill used for his religious opinions, and for worshipping God according to his indispensable obligations.”*

By the revolution, the constitution received a new modification in one of its most important features. The toleration of varieties in religion was now adopted as a grand principle of legislation, as a public statute of the realm, as a fundamental law for the government of the people. Diversities in men's religious opinions, and varieties in their forms of religious worship, were no longer considered as crimes against the state, but as perfectly consistent with the security of the government, and deserving of legal protection. Dissenters from the established church were not looked upon as enemies to the government, and as state criminals, but as worthy of being sheltered under the modified and mild constitution of their country. Such was the melioration and improvement in the statutes of the realm, when compared with the delusions and oppressions of the Tudors and the Stuarts!

The statute of toleration, it ought to be further observed, explicitly recognised the religious worship of nonconformists as equally legitimate and equally constitutional, as that of the most exact conformists in the nation. This law, from the memorable day on which it took effect, afforded legal and secure protection to nearly all denominations of dissenters;—it became an essential part of the English constitution, and a fundamental part of English law for the government of the people, equally as the act of uniformity. From the day on which this important measure was adopted by the legislative body, to the present hour, all persons who have openly disallowed to dissenters the privileges granted by this act, or have sought, by compulsory measures, to prevent either congregations or individuals from worshipping God according to the liberties guaranteed by this statute, have not only placed themselves among the patrons of intolerance and persecution, but proved

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 637.

themselves open enemies to the constitution and government of their country. These are the men, who, in profession, have proclaimed their attachment to the acts and proceedings of the government ; but who, in practice, have constantly opposed the operation of legal statutes in favour of the people. Thanks be to God, however, these enemies of religion and humanity, of God and their country, are fast retiring from society ; and having rendered themselves universally odious, we may hope that ere long the nation will be entirely rid of them, as persons disaffected to the laws, government and happiness of their country.

SECTION II.

Opposition to Comprehension and Toleration.

THE legal enactment of toleration was a memorable conquest of truth and moderation, over error and oppression, and though the triumph was only partial, it was incalculably important to the cause of religion, and it clearly evinced the favourable disposition of the legislative body. These learned and venerable senators, stimulated by the enlightened liberality of their prince, made a vigorous effort towards securing to human nature its unalienable and invaluable birthright ; and so laid the foundation of a noble fabric, to be erected by their posterity when religious emancipation shall be completed. It should be recollected, that when king William and his two houses of parliament guaranteed a legal toleration, they did not confer any signal favour, they only acted according to the dictates of nature and Christianity : for religious liberty, when considered even without limitation or restriction, “ is a right due to all men,” springing from the laws of nature, and the very essence of Christianity ; and to use coercion to force the conscience, which is “ God’s province,” is one of the discriminating marks of the antichristian beast.

These principles and facts are incontrovertible. Plain as the subject now appears, let it not be forgotten that it required a long series of ages, with many rivers of blood, to make it manifest to the rulers of the church. The primitive Chris-

tians, who lived under pagan tyranny, and felt with bitterness “the iron entering into their souls,” may well be supposed to have imbibed from the sacred Scriptures, as they actually did, the pure doctrine of liberty of conscience. They had no temptation from outward ease or worldly interest, to open their breasts to error ; and, accordingly, whenever they speak on this subject, their words are words of truth and peace. The spirit of intolerance gradually increased till the usurpers of ecclesiastical power became impatient of contradiction, and refused to bear a rival, or even to allow scrupulous Christians to live in peace. In this mournful state, things continued upwards of a thousand years !

The reformation from popery, it must be acknowledged, was a glorious event : but, while the church was purified in part, and only in part, from secularity and corruption, and the nation was released from a foreign despotic and cruel yoke, that yoke was only changed for domestic servitude. Whatever alterations were then adopted upon other points, few were adopted upon this ; and so thoroughly contaminated was the blood which flowed in the veins of many of the leading Reformers, with the poison of antichristian intolerance, that they, or even their successors, could scarcely learn the first rudiments of Christian liberty, or so feel the obligations of the Gospel as to abstain from persecuting those who could not assent to their creed. Holland certainly took the lead among the nations, and displayed unspeakably more of a tolerant disposition than any other country in Europe. At length, however, England, though nearly seventeen hundred years after the birth of Christ, recognised as a principle by the legislative body of the nation, that Christians, living peaceably under the government of their country, and holding no principle contrary to its welfare, ought to be allowed to worship God in a manner agreeable to the dictates of their consciences.

This representation of facts gives a deadly blow to the system of those, who are always looking back with wonder and veneration to the wisdom and goodness of their ancestors ; and who conceive that the farther they look back, the wiser and better their ancestors were. This has been the common delusion of mankind, and exists in no ordinary degree even at this day. The church, surely, is only in leading-strings, and has

scarcely escaped from infancy to childhood, when its members have not learnt that their neighbour has the same right to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience, as they have themselves; and that it is the worst kind of cruelty to hinder him from rendering his homage publicly to God, merely because he thinks proper to do it in a way different from them.

King William's triumph over opposition in obtaining a religious toleration, urged him forwards, if possible, to gain fresh conquests, and roused his laudable energies to procure still greater liberties and privileges for all his subjects. He was desirous that every man should enjoy an equal share of those unmolested rights, which are inseparable from his very existence. By the act of toleration he laid a broad foundation, upon which, to the great honour of his character, he endeavoured to rear a magnificent superstructure. This he did by his philanthropic efforts to promote a *comprehension*. The scheme was called by this name, because, by the removal of those exceptionable parts of the liturgy against which objections had been generally raised, it was thought the greater part of the presbyterians, and perhaps some others, would be brought within the pale of the church; and so the measure, without doing the church the least degree of injury, would greatly contribute to her charity and reputation—her peace and prosperity.

The scheme was not new. It had been promised to the presbyterians, then the most powerful party, by king Charles II., before he left the continent to ascend the throne, but was set aside by the act of uniformity. When the ill consequences arising from the want of it were afterwards felt, it was proposed to the nonconformists in the year 1668, and a plan for that purpose was drawn up and patronized by some of the first characters in the nation; but so violent was the spirit of intolerance and opposition to every thing like moderation, that the commons even refused the bill to be brought into the house. Towards the close of king Charles's reign, when the bill of exclusion was before the house and warmly debated, a comprehension became a matter of consideration, but nothing could be done for want of friendly co-operation.

The long and hasty strides of king James towards Rome,

having alarmed his protestant subjects, the bishops and clergy felt themselves in the greatest terror and alarm; and in the petition for which the seven bishops were sent to the tower, they spoke of their “tenderness for the dissenters, in relation to whom they were willing to come to such a temper as should be thought fit, when that matter should be considered and settled in the parliament and convocation.”* This business was afterwards carried much farther. Archbishop Sancroft foreseeing a change near at hand, and sensible of the evil effects at the restoration, arising from the want of some plan ready prepared for composing the differences of the episcopalians and presbyterians by uniting both within the ecclesiastical establishment, resolved to have a plan in readiness to be proposed and adopted if such an event should take place. He accordingly set to work, and invited the assistance of his brethren, to make a draught of such alterations and amendments in the various offices of the church, as appeared most likely to satisfy all parties. The design was to improve and enforce the discipline of the church, to review and enlarge the liturgy, by correcting some things, and adding others, and, if it should seem advisable to those in authority, by leaving some of the ceremonies, confessedly indifferent in their natures, as indifferent in their usage, so as not necessarily to be observed by those who scrupled them.† This good design was approved by the other bishops, who united with his grace of Canterbury in promoting the scheme.

The new government being finally settled under king William, the metropolitan could not conscientiously take the oaths required, and in a short time retired from Lambeth palace into private life, which is the first instance of the kind on record. Those who differ from him in judgment, must honour and admire his integrity. He who quits the see of Canterbury, with all its revenues and all its honours, to bury himself in obscurity, on the ground of conscientious scruples, has a claim to the character of something more than an honest man. One of the last acts of archbishop Sancroft and his non-juring brethren, was to move that in addition to the toleration, a bill for the comprehension of the dissenters might be brought into

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 483.

† Bishop of Lincoln's Speech, p. 4.

the parliament. The scheme was introduced and debated, but it was soon found to be a measure far more difficult than that of toleration. The act of toleration permitted the dissenters to live without the church; but the act of comprehension proposed bringing them to her very altars. That conferred neither honour nor emoluments; but this would have introduced hundreds of new candidates for every department of ecclesiastical office.

This important measure was warmly patronized by the king, and as warmly supported by his ministers. The bill was not intended to break the frame of the church, but to give it strength and firmness. No alteration was intended, except in points declared by the church to be alterable; while the essential part of the doctrine, government, and worship were to be preserved. The alterations were to be made according to prudence and charity, to restore to its proper use what had been abused, and to revise and improve the various services. It had always been the custom of the Christian church, not excepting the church of Rome, to change its offices in all ages, without incurring the danger of inconsistency. The accommodation of things to scrupulous minds had been promised, and was indispensably necessary to remove from the church the imputation of persecution. At so great a distance from the reformation, after so many revolutions, but especially after so many powerful objections had been alleged, a review of the constitution was become extremely seasonable, and more likely to be accomplished than at any former period; while it was the only way to remove existing scruples from many enlightened minds. It could not undermine the church, since nothing was to be done without the sanction of ecclesiastical power. The proposed alterations would not take away the fences of the church; for after the essentials and conveniences of religion were secured, the unity and affection of all her members were, under God, the strongest barriers. The fences which had hitherto been employed in her defence, had in them more trouble than security.

The bill, it was further urged, was so framed as to give all reasonable satisfaction to scrupulous minds. Things indifferent in their own nature were to be left indifferent; so that the grand objection of their being made unlawful by imposition

would have been entirely removed : consequently whether they were used or not used, there would have been no bar against friendly communion. A confident expectation was, therefore, entertained that the bill, which offered terms so full of Christian moderation, and so adapted to unite all protestants, would certainly have met the approbation of all foreign protestants, and it was expected to have given satisfaction to most of the protestants in England. The bill was approved by the truest and best churchmen ; and, had there been no dissenters in the kingdom, the scheme would have greatly contributed to the honour and interest of the church.

One clause in the bill appointed a certain number of persons, including both clergy and laity, to weigh the subject maturely, and to form a scheme of such alterations and amendments in the affairs of the church as might be deemed expedient, and to present them to the parliament to be incorporated in the bill, and adopted by the legislature. This measure was urged by many of the temporal lords with great earnestness and force of argument. “ But,” says Burnet, “ I, at that time, did imagine that the clergy would have come into such a design with zeal and unanimity, and I feared this would be looked on by them as taking the matter out of their hands ; and for that reason I argued so warmly against this, that it was carried by a small majority to let it fall. I was convinced soon after that I had taken wrong measures ; and that the method proposed by these lords, was the only one likely to prove effectual : but this did not so recommend me to the clergy, as to balance the censure I came under, for moving in another proviso of the bill, that the subscription instead of ‘ assent and consent ’ should only be to submit with a promise of conformity.”* In consequence of this measure, a commission was issued by the king to thirty learned divines, ten of whom were bishops, which was expressed in the following words :

“ Whereas, the particular forms of divine worship, and the rites and ceremonies appointed to be used therein, are things in their own nature indifferent and alterable, and so acknowledged ; it is but reasonable that upon weighty and important

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 10.

considerations, according to the various exigencies of times and occasions, such changes and alterations should be made therein, as to those that are in place and authority, should from time to time seem either necessary or expedient.

“Whereas the book of canons is fit to be reviewed, and made more suitable to the state of the church; and whereas there are defects and abuses in the ecclesiastical courts and jurisdictions, and particularly there is not sufficient provision made for the removing of scandalous ministers, and for the reforming of manners either in ministers or people: and it is most fit, that there should be a strict method prescribed for the examination of such persons as desire to be admitted into holy orders, both as to their learning and manners.

“We, therefore, out of our pious and princely care, for the good order and edification, and unity of the church of England committed to our charge and care, and for the reconciling, as much as is possible, of all differences among our good subjects, and to take away all occasions of the like for the future, have thought fit to authorize and empower you, &c., and any nine of you, whereof three to be bishops, to meet from time to time as often as shall be needful, and to prepare such alterations of the liturgy and canons, and such proposals for the reformation of ecclesiastical courts, and to consider of such other matters as in your judgments may most conduce to the ends above-mentioned.”*

The royal commission breathes that spirit, and desires that reformation, for the attainment of which the advocates of Christian freedom, had pleaded and suffered for upwards of a hundred years. When the commissioners assembled, some of them deserted the cause; concluding, as many of their predecessors had concluded, either that no alterations ought to be made, or that this was an unseasonable time for making them. But the “better and much greater” part set themselves vigorously to the work, with a view to accomplish so worthy a design. Concerning the fruit of the labours of such men, acting under such high authority, unbiassed posterity will desire to be informed: because for learning, for moderation, for respectability, as they stood high in the judgment of their own age,

* Kennet, vol. iii. p. 551.

so they have maintained an equal degree of celebrity among literary men to the present day.

The numerous important alterations which were deemed expedient having been agreed to by the commissioners, the next step was to lay them before the convocation, which was convened by the king for that purpose. Upon their first assembling, his majesty sent them a message by the earl of Nottingham, "assuring them of his constant favour and protection, and desiring them to consider such things as, by his order, should be laid before them, with due care and an impartial zeal for the peace and welfare of the church." Notwithstanding all these preparations, and these authoritative instructions from the throne, they refused to take the subject into consideration. This disgraceful refusal of the king's message, raised a loud and just outcry against the clergy; since all the promises which they had made in the late reign were now entirely forgotten.* Thus the important measure completely failed in the house of convocation, through the unconquerable jealousy and distrust of the clergy.†

At this juncture it was, that the celebrated Mr. John Howe defended the proposed measure as matter of unalienable right. He went upon the obvious principle, that the dissenters were placed under one common obligation, with the rest of mankind, by the universal law of nature, to worship God in their public assemblies. His argument he then directed and applied to existing facts. "Men of all religions," said he, "Jews, Pagans, Mahometans, Christians, have in their practice acknowledged this obligation. Whereas the religion professed in England is that of *reformed* Christianity; yet some things are annexed to it which are acknowledged to be no parts of it, or necessary to it, but which the dissenters judge to be in some respects sinful. They cannot, therefore, with a good conscience towards God, attend wholly and solely upon the public worship which the laws do appoint. The same laws also strictly forbid their assembling otherwise to worship God. Which is in effect the same thing as if those who made or continued such laws, should plainly say, 'If you will not consent with us in our superadded rites and modes against your consciences, you

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 33.

† Kennet, vol. iii. p. 552.

shall not worship God ; or if you will not accept of our *additions* to the Christian religion, you shall not be Christians.' This manifestly tends to reduce a great part of a Christian nation to Paganism."

On these premises, the dissenters had been accustomed for many years, unless restrained by violence, to hold distinct assemblies, and to worship God in a way which their consciences approved ; upon which Mr. Howe inquired, whether their conduct was blameable ? Whether laws enjoining *additions* to religion, acknowledged by all not to be essential and necessary, and by many deemed sinful, thus becoming exclusive terms of communion, ought to have been passed ? Whether such laws should be continued, especially at a time when the nation was professedly rescued from slavery ? And whether it was reasonable to exclude all who conformed not in every thing to the church of England, from any part or share of the civil power ? The author discussed these questions with much pertinent illustration, and force of argument. " It ought to be considered," said he, " that Christianity, wherein it superadds to the law of nature, is all matter of revelation ; and it is well known, that even among Pagans, in settling rites and institutes of religion, revelation was at least pretended ; upon an implied principle, that in such matters human power could not oblige the people's consciences."*

The grand scheme had no better success in the house of commons, than it had among the clergy. A considerable party was adverse to the new government. Many were so strongly attached to the old forms and observances of the church, as if antiquity had made them sacred, that, under this delusion, the idea of alterations filled them with disgust and horror. Others thought, that to yield to the desires of the nonconformists, was degrading the establishment. That, however, which most astonished the warm advocates of the bill, was, that many members who had always acted as friends to the dissenters, were hostile to the measure. This was particularly the case with those who, without examining minutely the grounds of the dispute, acted upon the broad principles of general liberty. They are said to have reasoned thus :

* Calamy's Howe, p. 146.

“ If this bill pass into a law, two thirds of the dissenting ministers will enter the establishment. They will, in consequence of this, acquire the party spirit of the clerical order : at any rate their successors will. Our clergy were never friends of liberty, but have always clung to the throne ; and if they have been caressed and secure, we have ever found them to be the advocates of the prerogative, and unconcerned about the rights of the people. The puritans, the nonconformists, and the dissenters, have, on the other hand, been the steadfast assertors of the liberties of Englishmen. If all the present ministers remain without the pale of the church, they and the people will form a considerable body to balance the opinions of the clergy, and by that means serve effectually for the preservation of the freedom of the constitution. Should they, in consequence of an act of comprehension, enter the church, all these advantages will be lost. Those who remain dissenters will be few in number and inconsiderable, their influence will be small, and there is danger that the toleration granted, will not meet with due respect nor remain in force. Whereas if the number of those who continue out of the church be considerable, they will have an influence which will be beneficial to the cause of freedom, and the act which tolerates them will remain inviolate.”*

With these views, they voted against the bill, and it was thrown out. The failure of the comprehension was, to some persons, a source of deep regret : but at this distance of time, being enabled to take a more enlarged view of the subject, men will behold it as falling far short of complete reformation. The design was twofold : to promote a further reformation of the church, and to extend the privileges of dissenters. The alterations proposed and made in the various services of the church amounted to *six hundred* ; and being made by such men as Tillotson, Burnet, Stillingfleet, Patrick, Sharp, Kidder, Beveridge, and many others of equal eminence, there was undoubtedly some reason for the dissenters to complain. The names of these distinguished persons stand on record to this day as heralds, incessantly proclaiming, that, in their opinion, there were no less than *six hundred* points in the church of

* Bogue and Bennet, vol. i. p. 218.

England which then stood, and now stand, in need of reformation! The attachment of these celebrated divines to the established church will not be doubted: their writings render it unquestionable. As to their abilities, natural and acquired, no age of the English church, before or since, has produced at once a greater number of superior men than were in that commission: We are not to conclude that the first Reformers possessed all the wisdom, learning, experience, and piety in the world, nor that the antiquity of the reformation made it perfect; for in many respects these distinguished persons enjoyed advantages far superior to those, who, in the dawn of the reformation, compiled the liturgy. The developments of these learned persons, however, were so dreadfully alarming, that the generous measure was relinquished, and all things left to continue as they were, lest the dreaded arm of reformation should lay the axe to the root of the tree.

By the rejection of the bill, the church sustained a double loss. Instead of being enabled to accept the improvements of these excellent men, which would have been an invaluable advantage to the composition of the liturgical service, to be compelled for more than a hundred years longer, to use the obsolete, uncouth, and, in many places, very offensive phraseology of the sixteenth century, when the English language was in a rude unpolished state, was an injury of no ordinary magnitude. And for the church to deprive herself of the services of so many hundreds of learned, pious, and zealous ministers, who would probably, upon such reformation, have returned to her communion, was a loss to her which language will not easily describe.

Whether the exclusion of dissenters from the national establishment, by the failure of the comprehension, was beneficial or detrimental to the religious freedom and highest interests of our country, is a question of a very different nature. As to the beneficial influence of the dissenters, on the preservation and establishment of political liberty in England, the resolution of that point may be safely left to the decision of the best patriots and the most enlightened patrons of freedom, who have no connexion with their religious opinions. The other part of the question may be conceived to be of more difficult solution. Some may think it as clear as the noon-day

sun, that not allowing the dissenters to return to the bosom of the church, contributed greatly to the detriment of religion, since their ministers would in this case have had an opportunity of preaching to far more numerous congregations ; while, on the other hand, the allowance of such incorporation would, in the opinion of many, have shaken, and eventually have overthrown, the ecclesiastical establishment to its very foundations.

Upon the latter of these notions it will not be necessary to make any comment ; but with respect to the former, it may be justly observed, that it is not upon mere *numbers* that the question rests : something else must be taken into the account. Some religious societies are voluntary, when their union is the result of conviction and choice. Others are formed by a geographical circumference, and according to legislative prescriptions ; so vicinity of habitation, and the observance of established custom, are their reasons for assembling to worship in the same place. Between a voluntary society of Christian worshippers, and a mass of people living within certain parochial boundaries, the difference is immense. Among the former class the probability of doing good is almost incomparably greater than in the latter : this will apply to all country congregations.

As to the parish minister, who labours in a city, or populous town, his audience is not the parish population : it is with few exceptions a voluntary society, and bears a considerable resemblance to a dissenting congregation. Yet even in these situations it will be found, on an average, that the advantage is in favour of the dissenters. There is strong evidence of the comparatively small effect of evangelical preaching among parish ministers, when, on the demise of a good clergyman, one of a very different description frequently succeeds him ; and it is commonly seen, that the people of the parish attend on his ministry nearly as much as they did on that of his predecessor ; and though a few complain, the mass are satisfied. These are unquestionable facts ; and in how many instances is this the case, for one in which the people, unable to sit under the new clergyman, form a society of their own, and choose a preacher to their own mind ? There have been laudable exceptions to this general practice ; but how few in comparison of the others ! nevertheless, of the success of a minister, and of

the influence of his doctrine, such a day of trial affords one of the surest tests.

A still more striking illustration of the subject appears in the case of the very man concerning whom the question is discussed. The nonconformists, before the restoration, were parish ministers; and for laborious diligence and zeal, as well as learning, abilities, and piety, they had few superiors. Yet the fruit of their ministry appears to have been, in general, comparatively small. After they were silenced, and others of a very different complexion appointed to succeed them, the number of those who adhered to their old ministers, and formed separate voluntary societies, was in general far from large. The size of most of the old dissenting chapels, both in London and the country, furnishes incontestible proof of this. But, while their congregations were commonly rather small, their zeal, their number, their unanimity, their usefulness, and their reputation, has progressively increased to the present day. From these obvious facts, and others of a similar nature, which might be adduced, it will appear that too great a stress has been laid on the circumstance of mere *number*, without taking into consideration the materials of which that number is composed, and the maxims by which they are unavoidably regulated.

The beneficial effects of a voluntary association, formed on the model of the New Testament, for the government of a Christian society; the closeness and endearments of the relation between the members of it, and the pastor of their own choice; the importance of maintaining purity of communion, by excluding the ignorant and the wicked from the table of the Lord; and the various modes of advancing religion which arise out of these, are all to be taken into the account by those who would, with impartiality, investigate the subject in all its bearings, and in all its extent. When every part of it is maturely considered, the pious pastor of a voluntary society of two hundred persons may receive great encouragement from the recollection, that in his congregation there is a larger proportion of divine knowledge, Christian zeal, and unfeigned piety, than in ordinary parishes of ten times the population. These are facts which the best of the clergy are willing to acknowledge. In addition to this, it ought to be remembered,

that a parish minister cannot move beyond the circle of his parish, without exposing himself to severe punishment for this imaginary crime. Whereas the whole British empire, or rather the whole world, is the parish of the minister who is not fettered by the enactments and impositions of men. If in any particular situation his field of labour be too confined, he may widen it, and extend his zealous efforts to do good to mankind in all directions. There is no canon or edict in the New Testament to forbid him.*

These reflections will not, we trust, be found uninteresting to the impartial reader; while they stand closely connected with the great subject under consideration. The proposed comprehension being lost, a toleration was the only prize obtained by the friends of liberty; which they esteemed of great value, received with lively gratitude, and endeavoured to improve as an inestimable privilege. Inflexibly attached to the new government and the order of things as established at the revolution, they were justly regarded among the most loyal and worthy subjects of the empire.

It was a fact greatly to be lamented, that a spirit of envy and ill-will against the friends of liberty soon discovered itself among the established clergy; who, notwithstanding their reiterated promises and assurances during their afflictions under the despotism of king James, were exceedingly displeased at the degree of liberty which was granted them, and seemed disposed, had it been in their power, to have snatched it from them. Such is the testimony borne by a contemporary writer of their own order. Upon events which take place at any period, those who live at some distance may be able to form a more accurate judgment; yet the true spirit of a people, with their feelings and tempers on particular occasions, are best delineated by the historian of the times. This advantage was enjoyed by bishop Burnet, in whose ample narrative this unhappy disposition of his brethren is stated in strong language.

The clergy, this prelate observes, generally took the oaths to the new government, though with too many reservations and distinctions, which laid them open to severe censure, as if they had taken them against their consciences. They were

* Bogue and Bennett, vol. i. p. 223.

strangely infatuated with a spirit of jealousy, which they extended not only to the dissenters, but even to the king himself, on account of the liberality of his sentiments, and his favour shown to all parties, but especially for the abolition of episcopacy and the erection of presbyterianism in Scotland. Alarmed about their preferments and worldly lucre, some supposed the church would be pulled down, while others concluded that men of more moderate principles would engross all the preferments. Placed in these dubious circumstances, these reverend and right reverend gentlemen fought their enemies by the use of the old weapons—*calumny* and *slander*.*

Had the king been ever so much disposed, it would have been impossible to prevent the changes in Scotland, without involving the nation in the utmost confusion. The episcopalians were almost to a man in king James's interest; so that the only friends king William had in that country were the presbyterians. His majesty, placed in these circumstances, left the affairs of the church in a great measure to the queen. He found it impossible to resist importunities, which were not only vexatious to him, but had drawn preferments from him that were ill bestowed. This business the queen managed with great religious prudence; and she declared openly against the preferment of the unqualified who sought after it, and in favour of those who were much more deserving. She took considerable pains to ascertain which of the clergy, on the ground of merit, though unknown at court, were most worthy of royal favour; and to such was the munificence of her heart extended. Her chief counsellor was the learned and pious Tillotson, now made archbishop of Canterbury; whom she favoured and protected against the malice of all his enemies. No archbishop had ever before applied himself so entirely, without partiality, to all the concerns of religion; yet such an evil spirit seemed to be let loose upon the clergy, that many of them censured every thing he did, and studiously depressed him to the utmost of their power.

"We were all soon convinced," my author adds, "that there was a sort of clergymen among us who would never be satisfied so long as the toleration was continued; and they

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 28, 29.

seemed resolved to sound the alarm, that the church was in danger, till the prosecution of dissenters should be again revived: nor could they look at a man with patience, or speak of him with temper, who did not agree with them in these things. The bishops fell under the displeasure of the whigs, by the methods they took, not only of protecting, but of preferring some of these men, hoping by that means to have softened both them and their friends: but they accepted their preferments as rewards which they supposed due to their merit, and employed the credit and authority which their preferments brought them, wholly against those to whom they owed them!!”*

The bigotry and intolerance of these persons is further described. Among the clergy were two different parties: one was faithful and firm to the present government, and served it with zeal. These did not envy the dissenters the ease which the toleration gave them: they wished for a favourable opportunity of making such alterations in certain rites and ceremonies, as might bring into the church those who were not at too great a distance from it; and, my author adds, “I do freely own that I was one of this number.” Others indeed took the oaths, and concurred in every act of compliance with the government; but they were not only cold in serving it, but always blaming the administration and aggravating its misfortunes. They expressed a great esteem for Jacobites, and, in all elections, gave their votes to those who leaned that way: at the same time, they showed great resentment against the dissenters, were enemies to the toleration, and seemed resolved never to consent to any toleration in their favour. “The *bulk of the clergy* ran this way; so that the moderate party was *far out-numbered*. Profane minds had too great advantage from this in reflecting severely on a body of men, who took oaths and performed public devotions, when the rest of their lives was too public and too visible a contradiction to such oaths and prayers!!”†

It is perhaps impossible to draw a fouler picture; yet, since it is drawn by a learned prelate of their own time, and of their own church, we cannot suppose the colouring too strong. Seeing, therefore, that this was the perverse humour of the “bulk

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 118.

† Ibid. p. 215.

of the clergy," no praise could be due to them for a legal toleration; and though the dissenters enjoy the invaluable blessing, no gratitude is due to the majority of these reverend gentlemen on that account. They discovered, as on all former occasions, a spirit of hostility against the moderate and worthy proceedings of the government, as well as against the native rights and liberties of the people. The shield of protection being held over the dissenters by the strong hand of government, the enjoyment of all the comforts of public worship afforded them the sweetest satisfaction. Men who had long been deprived of this benefit, or who had claimed it at the risk of fines or imprisonment, who, for this claim, had often sustained these injuries, learned to set a proper value on the sanctioned freedom of divine worship in the face of day.

While the advocates of Christian liberty had no great reason to complain of infraction on the express terms of the toleration act, there were different opinions respecting its extent. Various things, they conceived, were implied and supposed, which, though not expressed, must necessarily have formed a part of its benefits. The clergy, on the other hand, explained it with greater strictness, and insisted that it did not grant any thing that was not plainly expressed. The education of young men for the ministry among dissenters, was one of those considerations about which this difference of judgment first appeared. "If we have liberty of worship," said the dissenters, "we must have ministers to officiate: but our present ministers are not immortal; they must die, and we must have others to succeed them. These must receive instructions to qualify them for the work; and places of education are necessary for this purpose: therefore it is plain they must be comprehended in the act. It would otherwise be a repetition of the fable of Tantalus; or of that Turkish policy, by which it is forbidden to Christians to build their places which have fallen into decay."

The clergy were of a different mind, not only the lofty intolerant members of the hierarchy, but those who were accounted moderate upon points of difference. Among these are found the names of Stillingfleet and Tillotson. The former having been promoted to the see of Worcester, in his charge to his clergy, at his primary visitation, addressed them in

these words :—“ But if, after all, they (the dissenters) grow more headstrong and insolent by the indulgence which the law gives them ; then mark, whether they observe those conditions on which the law gives it to them. For these are known rules in law, that he forfeits his privilege who goes beyond the bounds of it ; and that no privileges are to be extended beyond the bounds which the laws give them, for they ought to be observed as they are given. I leave it to be considered, whether such as do not observe the conditions of the indulgences be not as liable to the law as if they had none.” Tillotson’s sentiments on this subject are contained in his letter to Sharp, archbishop of York, who had consulted him respecting Mr. Frankland, an eminent dissenting minister, who kept an academy within his diocese ; and they discover how much men, even the most respectable, are influenced by their outward circumstances and official situations. In this letter, dated from Lambeth, June 14, 1692, he addressed him in these words :

“ Yesterday I received your grace’s letter concerning Mr. Frankland, with the copy of an address to your grace against him. Yourself are the best judge, what is fit to be done in this case, because you have the advantage of inquiring into all the circumstances of it. If my advice can signify any thing, it can only be to tell your grace what I would do in it, as the case appears to me at this distance. I would send for him, and tell him that I would never do any thing to infringe the act of toleration : but I did not think his case within it : that there were two things in his case which would hinder me from granting him a license, though he were in all things conformable to the church of England ; first, his setting up a school, where a school is already established ; and then his instructing of young men in *so public a manner in university learning*, which is contrary to his oath to do, if he have taken a degree in either of our universities ; and, I doubt, contrary to the bishop’s oath to grant a license for the doing of it : so that your grace does not, in this matter, consider him at all as a dissenter. This I only offer to your grace as what seems to me the fairest and softest way of ridding your hands of this business.”*

* Birch’s Life of Tillotson, p. 296.

The dissenters, notwithstanding the benefits of the late act, were placed in rather awkward circumstances. They were, indeed, allowed to worship God in their own way; yet their youths were debarred from the two national universities; and, wonderful as it may seem, they must not be allowed the benefit of education in the humble situation of a country academy! Their ministers must, therefore, either be self-taught, or be unlearned; so that their reputation and interest must be ruined. Prosecutions against men for opening schools and diffusing useful knowledge were more suitable to the age of Gothic barbarism, than to the times of the revolution, when the day-star of light and liberty was rising on our Island.

It was an unspeakable blessing to the nation, that the king was so much more tolerant than his clergy. By his authority, as head of the church, he checked that flaming zeal by which the clergy so much alarmed and injured their fellow-subjects; and, so long as he lived, he preserved the principles and practice of toleration mostly entire, notwithstanding the numerous malevolent attempts to abridge or repeal it. From the bitterness of party, and the awful want of principle in many from whom better things might have been expected, the king had no very easy life: in the English crown the sharpest thorns were mingled with its gems. King William was a great man, whose mind was endowed with superior qualities; his sentiments of religious freedom were liberal and enlarged, far beyond the body of the established clergy, or the mass of nobility or gentry; and his royal aid, in conjunction with his example and influence, greatly contributed to promote the disgrace of persecution, and to abate, or restrain, the furious wrath of bigotry.

The friends of religious liberty, it is well known, have constantly revered the memory of the illustrious house of Brunswick, and have uniformly maintained a steady attachment to the reigning family. The history of our country proves, that whenever the Stuarts have preferred the Anti-British claim of legitimacy in opposition to a monarch of the people's choice, the house of Brunswick has always found a bulwark in their well-tryed principles and steady loyalty. It is in vain, therefore, to insinuate, that those who do not belong to the established church, are necessarily less attached to the prince and constitution, than their more favoured fellow-subjects. The

insinuation is detected and refuted by the plainest historical facts; and the act of toleration, it ought to be recollected, is no less a part of the constitution, than even the act of supremacy.

Among the various classes who avowed and advocated the cause of Christian freedom, it would be improper not to mention the quakers. They testified the firmest loyalty and attachment to king William from the day of his settlement on the throne; and though the act of toleration left them still involved in certain difficulties, particularly upon the point of taking oaths, they at length obtained satisfactory relief. By the generous efforts of the king, a bill was introduced into the parliament, which passed the two houses, and obtained the royal assent, allowing them, in all courts of justice and on all other necessary occasions, to make the following declaration, instead of taking an oath:—"I, A. B. do declare in the presence of Almighty God, the witness of the truth of what I say."*

The friends were not forgetful of this extension of legislative melioration, but were truly thankful both to God and the government under which they lived. The enjoyment of their present liberty, in the undisturbed exercise of their consciences towards God, excited their gratitude and joy; and they lived peaceably and inoffensively under the government of their country, as they had done ever since they became a Christian society.†

The liberty of the press contributed in no small degree to soften the passions, and to promote a more liberal tone of feeling among the various denominations of Christians. This great national privilege had for a long time been encumbered by oppression, when the whole of its productions were under the arbitrary regulation of "licensors of the press." The final abolition of this unnatural restriction, was reserved to the first prince of the renowned house of Brunswick; and in the year 1694, by an act of the legislative body, the press was made free. Attempts were afterwards made to bring the released captive into fetters and bondage, and a bill was brought into parliament for that purpose; but, by the zealous energies for patriotic freedom, it was discountenanced and lost.‡

* Sewel, vol. ii. p. 524.

† Extracts, p. 16.

‡ Sewel, vol. ii. p. 541.

The reign of king William was not, however, without a stain. Upon the agitation of the doctrine of the trinity, the house of commons with great zeal interposed, and a law was passed, which enacted, “ that if any person educated in the Christian religion shall deny the same to be true, or the holy Scriptures to be of divine authority, or impugn the doctrine of the holy trinity, he shall be incapable of holding any office or place of trust, and for the second offence be disabled from bringing any action, or from acting as guardian, executor, legatee, or purchaser of lands, and shall suffer three years’ imprisonment without bail.”*

The catholics shared in greater oppression. The cloven foot of bigotry and enmity against them, which violated every principle of justice was strikingly visible by a new legislative enactment, denouncing, “ that priests saying mass, or exercising their functions, or keeping school, or educating or boarding youth, within these dominions, shall be *imprisoned for life*!” By another clause, all persons educated in, or professing, the popish religion, who within six months after attaining the age of eighteen, did not take the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, and subscribe the declaration of 30 Car. II., were disabled from taking by descent, devise, or limitation, possession, reversion, or remainder of any lands, tenements, or hereditaments in England, which were to be enjoyed during his or her life, by the next protestant heir, without being accountable for the profits! A catholic was likewise disabled from purchasing in his own name, or in the name of any other person in trust for him, any manors, lands, or profits out of lands, within the kingdom of England; and all such estates or profits arising from them, were declared entirely void †

Fidelity binds the unbiassed historian, with grief, to mention this flagrant intolerance and oppression. The civil magistrate is the guardian to every citizen against injustice from his fellow-citizens; but he is no umpire between God and man: he has no claim, by deputation from either, to decide what is religious truth; nor does he possess, either in his personal or official capacity, any peculiar prerogative or ability for so great a task. The same means of information, the same

* Belsham, vol. i. p. 452.

† Brown, p. 176.

oracles of divine truth, lie open to the magistrate and to the subject: each is responsible to God, but neither is responsible to man, for his religious opinions or practice.

As closely connected with this part of our narrative, a most important question arises: What ideas had the dissenters, during this period, upon the subject of religious liberty, and what progress did they make in this salutary science? The greater part of them bore the name of presbyterians, and a considerable majority were of that denomination. As presbyterianism is a system which will admit of being established by the civil power, it is in this respect on a level with episcopacy, and too strongly resembles it in having nothing in its nature, which necessarily stimulates its votaries to be greater friends to the rights of conscience. The power of presbytery, at least in this country, has not been so enormous, nor employed with so much terror, as that of episcopacy; yet that power has been used with as great willingness, and with all its force. Without adverting to the Scotch presbyterians, those of England, when in the zenith of their power, had no claim to liberality of sentiment, or to showing an equal regard to the rights of other men's consciences, as to those of their own. It is probable, however, that their sufferings afterwards softened their minds, and brought them to exercise greater moderation and forbearance. Whatever desire they had before the restoration, to establish an effective presbyterian government, they discovered none after the revolution.

As the old generation were, at no great distance from this last event, gathered to their fathers, their successors discovered no symptoms of wishing to act upon the presbyterian system: they retained the name only, and not the thing. Their principles became far more tolerant and liberal. The preceding age had produced few pieces which could be compared, for just ideas on religious liberty, to Dr. Calamy's introduction to the second volume of his "Defence of Moderate Nonconformity." Yet he was deemed as strenuous a presbyterian as any of his time; and those of his standing may in general be justly regarded as holding the same sentiments with him. How different are the views of Calamy from those of Edwards, the violent presbyterian in the days of the long parliament, whose furious intolerance is particularly stated in the former volume.

In the day of adversity, they learned an invaluable lesson; and, during the successive years of persecution, the Gospel engaged their chief attention, and supported them under their sufferings. When the revolution brought with it the enjoyment of quietness, and general deliverance from oppression, the minds of the votaries of freedom naturally took a wider range, and surveyed with great precision their distinguishing sentiments on church government. The result was necessarily favourable; and, during this early period, there was a gradual, and a considerable improvement, among the various classes of dissenters, in the science of religious liberty.

When men's theological and ecclesiastical opinions do not necessarily involve the principles of persecution, and they have no bias in their hearts from worldly interest, there is a probability of their being open to conviction; and if it be their happiness to enjoy intercourse with enlightened and candid men, or to be directed to the reading of authors distinguished for liberality and correctness of thought, the result will mostly be a visible improvement in just ideas, and generous sentiments. When temporal emoluments and pure principles are at variance with each other, persons, possessing knowledge and capacity, may continue for centuries without any perceptible advances towards truth; while party spirit has no inconsiderable influence to hold men fast in chains, and confine them all their days in the dungeon of error and delusion. Others, in the mean time, not superior in talents or literature, being emancipated from these weighty and enervating shackles, are making progress in the acquisition of those sentiments which improve the human intellect and heart, and meliorate, in a great degree, the moral and political state of society. In a course of time, others, whose proper province it was to take the lead in so noble an office, are slowly, because reluctantly dragged after them, and almost in spite of themselves are compelled to relinquish one prejudice and false principle after another.

It is almost universally acknowledged, that where the mind is not biassed by worldly interest, which often generates and always fosters prejudice, the truth will be perceived with greater clearness, and in greater purity. The best friends of liberty at this period were entirely free from such bias, when they received unadorned and unfettered truth for its own sake.

The enjoyment of toleration communicated, along with other benefits, a better temper, and enabled them to examine their principles with a calmer mind, and with kinder dispositions towards men of every denomination. In this state of mind, they were enabled to think more correctly, and to judge with greater precision: the result was beneficial to themselves and to the world. As the folly and wickedness of intolerance stared them in the face; so they deeply felt, that the rights of conscience ought to be inviolably sacred, and that all, without exception, should enjoy the liberty of worshipping God in the way which appeared to them most agreeable to divine institution.

On the whole, this period may be considered as highly favourable to religious liberty. Some opposition was made, and more probably intended; yet good principles began to be more firmly and more deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. Where the minds of men improve, and the light of divine truth shines on them, with brighter and more fervid beams, though events may be inauspicious and gloomy, the cause of human happiness will gain ground, and extend its benign influence in the world.*

Every class of Christians, possessed of liberal and just sentiments, will rejoice in the triumph of truth and liberty, over error and oppression—a triumph most decisive at the revolution. By this auspicious event, the people were roused to claim their indubitable rights—of seeing with their own eyes, and of judging by their own intellects. In former times, from a superstitious reverence of antiquity, and a groundless dread of innovation, men, even professed protestants, attempted to make the most erroneous and invidious distinction between truth and liberty. Having shaken off the leading corruptions of popery, and established what they conceived to be a pure and perfect system, they unhappily stopped short in their noble energies to obtain complete spiritual emancipation; preposterously attempting to deprive others of the common privilege of human nature, which they had so nobly claimed for themselves. This mistaken and dangerous spirit was in part subdued by the liberalized mind and worthy exertions of king William.

* Bogue and Bennett, vol. i. p. 284.

The reader will feel surprised, that the general principle of religious freedom should have been so many ages and centuries in coming to any thing like maturity. To search after the general display of it for a thousand years before the reformation would be in vain; and even that distinguished age, so fruitful of good to all succeeding ones, and so powerful in its reasonings against the lofty pretensions of Rome, presents us with very few striking specimens in favour of the self-evident and infinitely important principle, that conscience is accountable to God alone. In following generations we may search the writings of lutherans and calvinists, of episcopalians and presbyterians, for this doctrine almost in vain. Notwithstanding it is a doctrine incontrovertibly obvious on natural principles, and is evidently interwoven with all the amiable doctrines and maxims of Christianity, it was far beyond the discovery of those early ages: this discovery was reserved for later times. During the commonwealth, the subject was discussed with singular ability by the immortal Milton and some few others. Cromwell discovered that the utmost liberty in religious matters, was not only perfectly compatible with the safety of the state, but admirably conducive to its peace and prosperity. The remonstrants in Holland wrote many excellent pieces on the subject: their situation, under the iron rod of persecution, sharpened their wits, and gave soundness to their judgments. The ingenious Bayle treated the doctrine of religious liberty with singular ability.

But our own country had the honour of producing the ablest writer on this important doctrine. It is to the justly celebrated philosopher JOHN LOCKE, that the world is indebted for the best treatise on religious liberty, which has ever appeared since the day that the chief priests, the captain of the temple, and the sadducees, committed Peter and John to prison for preaching the doctrine of Christ. This enlightened person, on account of the liberality of his sentiments on religious subjects, became obnoxious to the English court, and, in the year 1684, was expelled from the university of Oxford, by a special order from king Charles; upon which, to obtain a refuge from the storm, he retired to Holland, where he wrote his first letter on Toleration, which he dedicated to the celebrated Limborch. It was published in Latin in the year 1689; and was

the same year translated into Dutch, French, and English, when it was cordially received by all persons of Christian liberality.

The distribution of our religious privileges has always been partial. The rights and liberties of the subject, the just inheritance of man, were, and still are, unequally divided; and those who have been sufferers in the cause, and have written on the subject, have mostly gone upon the narrow principles which only suited the interest of their own particular party. This narrowness of spirit has undoubtedly been one principal occasion of our miseries and distempers; and, to effect a thorough cure, we have need of more generous remedies. It is not declarations of indulgence, nor acts of comprehension, that can do this great work; but ABSOLUTE LIBERTY, JUST AND TRUE LIBERTY, EQUAL AND IMPARTIAL LIBERTY, IS THE THING THAT IS WANTED.

The great design of the immortal Locke was to demonstrate the *equity* of this liberty, that it is *practicable*, and that it ought, in justice, to regulate the *policy* of every state. It will not, therefore, be deemed improper to furnish the reader with a specimen of his luminous and conclusive reasoning, nearly in his own language; which, by the blessing of God, may prove a fresh stimulus to liberal sentiments, and an additional benefit to mankind.

The toleration of those who differ from us in matters of religion, says he, is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems more than strange for any professed Christian not to perceive clearly both its necessity and advantage. It is certainly the duty of the civil magistrate, by the impartial execution of equal laws, to secure to all his subjects in general and to every one in particular, the just possession of those things which belong to this life. If any one presume to violate the laws of public justice, established for the preservation of these things, his presumption is to be checked by the fear of punishment, consisting in the deprivation or diminution of those civil interests or goods, which otherwise he might and ought to enjoy. But, seeing no man willingly suffers himself to be punished by the deprivation of his goods, much less of his liberty or life; therefore is the magistrate armed with the force and strength of all his sub-

jects, for the punishment of those who violate any other man's rights. That the whole jurisdiction of the magistrate extends only to *civil* matters ; that all civil power, right, and dominion, is bounded and confined to these things *only* ; and that it neither can nor ought in any manner to be extended to men's *religious* concerns, or the care of their *souls*, the following considerations seem abundantly to demonstrate :

The care of souls is not committed to the civil magistrate, any more than to other men. It is not committed to him by God ; since it does not appear that God has ever given any such authority to any one man over another, so as to compel any one to be of his religion. Nor can any such power be vested in the magistrate by the consent of the people ; because no man can so far abandon the care of his own salvation, as blindly to leave it to the will of any other, whether prince or subject, to prescribe to him what faith or worship he shall receive. No man can, if he would, conform his faith to the dictation of another. All the life and power of true religion consists in the inward and full persuasion of the mind. Whatever profession we make, or whatever outward worship we observe, if we are not fully satisfied that the one is true, and the other well-pleasing to God, such profession and such practice, so far from being any furtherance, are indeed great obstacles to our salvation : yea, they add to the number of our other sins, those of hypocrisy, and the contempt of God.

The care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate, because the whole of his power consists in *outward force* : but true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God. Such is the nature of the human understanding, that it cannot be compelled to the belief of any thing by outward force. Confiscation of estates, imprisonments, or any other torments can never be sufficiently efficacious to make men change the judgment of their minds. The magistrate, it is acknowledged, may make use of arguments, draw the heterodox into the way of truth, and so promote their salvation ; but this is a prerogative common to him with other men. In teaching, instructing, and reclaiming the erroneous and the vicious, by sound reason and kind persuasion, he may certainly do what becomes any good man to do : magistracy does not oblige him to put off either

humanity or Christianity. But it is one thing to persuade, another to command: one thing to press with arguments, another with penalties. This the civil power alone has a right to do; to effect the other, good-will is sufficient authority. Every man is furnished with a commission, provided he has ability, to admonish, exhort, convince, and draw men to the truth: but to give laws, receive obedience, and compel with the sword, belongs to the magistrate alone. But the magistrate's power extends not to the establishment of any article of faith, or forms of worship, by the force of his laws. For laws are of no force without penalties, and penalties, seeing they cannot convince the mind, are absolutely impertinent. As penalties are unable to produce belief, or move the conscience; so it is light and evidence alone that can work a change in men's opinions—can move their hearts to approbation; and that light and evidence can in no case proceed from corporal sufferings, or any other outward penalties. All the power and penalties of the magistrate are confined to men's *civil* interests, or the concerns of this world, and have nothing to do with the worship of God, and the world to come.

If Christians are to be admonished to abstain from all manner of revenge, even after repeated provocations and multiplied injuries, how much more ought they who suffer nothing, who have had no harm done them, to forbear violence, and abstain from all manner of severe usage of those from whom they have received none? This caution and temper they ought certainly to use towards those who mind only their own business, and, whatever men think of them, are only solicitous that they may worship God in that manner which they are persuaded is acceptable to him, and in which they have the strongest hopes of eternal salvation. In private domestic affairs, in the management of estates, and in the preservation of bodily health, every man is allowed to consider what most suits his own convenience, and to follow that course which he likes best. No man repines at the ill management of his neighbour's affairs. No man is angry with another for an error committed in sowing his land, or in marrying his daughter. If a man pull down, or build, or expend his property, no one controls him; he enjoys his liberty. But if any man do not frequent the church, if he do not conform his behaviour exactly to the accustomed cere-

monies, or if he bring not his children to be initiated in the sacred mysteries of this or the other congregation; this immediately causes an uproar, and the neighbourhood is filled with clamour and ill-will: every one is ready to be the avenger of so great a crime! The zealots hardly have patience to refrain from violence and rapine, until the cause be heard, and the poor man be, according to form, condemned to the loss of liberty, goods, or life. O that our ecclesiastical orators of every sect, would apply themselves, with all the strength of argument in their power, to the confounding of men's errors! But let them spare their persons, and not supply their want of reasons by instruments of force, which belong to another jurisdiction, and look ill in the hands of churchmen. Let them not call the magistrate's authority to aid their eloquence, or learning; lest, perhaps, while they pretend only love for the truth, their intemperate zeal, breathing nothing but intolerance, betray their ambition, and their desire of dominion.

Suppose, for instance, an inconsiderable number of Christians transport themselves to a pagan country; and upon their arrival they beseech the native inhabitants, in the bowels of humanity, to succour them with the necessaries of life: those necessaries are given them, habitations are granted, they are all joined together, and they grow up into one body of people. The Christian religion, by the introduction of these strangers, takes root and spreads in the country; but does not suddenly become the strongest. While things are in this condition, peace, friendship, confidence, and equal justice, are happily preserved. At length the magistrates becomes Christian, and by that means their party becomes the most powerful. Are all compacts then in this case to be broken, all civil rights to be violated, that idolatry may be extirpated? Unless these harmless Pagans, strict observers of equity and the laws of society, will forsake their ancient religion, and embrace another, are they to be turned out of the lands and possessions of their forefathers, and perhaps be deprived of life itself? This will elucidate every other case. We now see what fiery zeal for a sect or a church, united with the desire of dominion, is capable of producing; and how easily the pretence of religion, and of the care of souls, serves for a cloke to ambition, rapine, and covetousness.

The great question here is not which denomination is strongest or most numerous, but what is the *rule of right*. Those who would violate this rule are undoubtedly unfit subjects to enjoy a free and full toleration ; at least, till they provide some security for their good behaviour. They call themselves *the orthodox*, or *the church*, and claim to themselves all the civil power and privileges, to the exclusion of all other subjects ; and, on pretence of religion, they challenge and exercise all manner of authority over those who are not associated with them in the same ecclesiastical communion. All such persons, whether denominated catholics or protestants, render themselves by their own violence and oppression incapable of toleration ; and they must renounce their own cruel intolerance, manifest more liberal deportment to others, and inculcate the just doctrine of tolerating all peaceable subjects, before they can in reason and justice have any ground of claim to the privilege themselves. By their principles and practice, they disturb the peace and good order of society ; they sow the seeds of discord and separation among Christian brethren ; and, whatever may be their pretensions, they prove themselves enemies to the rights and liberties of mankind, and oppressors of the church of God.

We cannot, with any degree of truth, accuse the Christian religion of being turbulent and destructive of the peace of society. On the contrary, it inspires the strongest opposition against covetousness, ambition, discord, contention, and every evil work. It is not the diversity of men's religious opinions, which cannot be avoided ; but the refusal of liberty to those who are of different opinions, which has produced all the wars and confusions that have been in the Christian world on account of religion. The heads and leaders of the church, moved by avarice and the insatiable desire of dominion, have employed the immoderate ambition of magistrates, and the credulous superstition of the giddy multitude ; have incensed and animated them against those who have dissented from themselves ; and, contrary to the precepts of the Gospel and of charity, have stigmatized them heretics or schismatics, and so to be punished or destroyed. Thus have they mixed together and confounded two things, which are in themselves absolutely different, the church and the commonwealth.

These confusions and cruelties will remain so long as those,

who ought to be the preachers of peace and concord, shall continue to excite men to arms, and sound the trumpet of war. That magistrates should thus suffer these disturbers of the public peace, would excite the utmost surprise, if they had not been invited to a participation of the spoil ; but they have used their pride and covetousness as the means of increasing their own power. All who will be at the trouble to examine the page of history, will clearly see that these men have, in every age, been more the ministers of the *Government*, than the ministers of the *Gospel* ; and, by flattering the ambition, and favouring the dominion of princes and those in authority, they have endeavoured with all their might to promote that tyranny in the commonwealth, which otherwise could not have been established in the church. This is the unhappy and unnatural agreement that we see between the church and the state. Whereas if each was confined within its own proper boundaries, the one attending to the temporal welfare of the commonwealth, the other to the worship of God and the salvation of souls, the existence of such discord and confusion would be impossible.*

This is a specimen of the views and arguments of the renowned Locke, as contained in the first of his celebrated letters on toleration. By this enlightened philosopher, the doctrine of religious liberty is so ably treated, the foundation so strongly and deeply laid, the statement so luminous, the argument so convincing, and the matter so applicable to all denominations, to all countries and all times, and so remote from every thing of local prejudice and party spirit, that for any one to attempt a refutation of it, would be equally futile and unsuccessful as an attempt to prove that the sun gives no light at noon-day. Those who wish to improve their minds by just ideas of what they owe to rulers, and of what rulers owe to them, ought to make themselves familiarly conversant with Locke's letters on Toleration. What multiplied obligations do the churches of Britain, and the whole of Christendom, owe to the superior discernment and liberalized views of this enlightened man ! To his memory, a monument, durable as time, ought to be erected in the most conspicuous part of the temple of fame.

* Locke's Works, vol. v. p. 5—54.

He refutes the common, but erroneous notion of toleration ; and defends, with irresistible evidence, the universal and unbounded liberty of Christians. Toleration, according to the common acceptation, is only modified injustice : where it is largest in its provisions, and most liberal in its spirit, it still retains the character of encroachment upon conscience, and upon our responsibility to God. We can never acknowledge, that permission to believe the Gospel, and to worship God, is either to be solicited or accepted as a *favour* from man. No human creature can ever be placed under legal obligations to another for the discharge of his duty to his Creator. When, therefore, any one class of men talk of allowing us to render homage unto God, it involves the grossest absurdity ; but if they talk of allowing the Almighty to receive our homage, it rouses universal indignation.

It will then be asked, must the State be without religion ? If by the State be meant the persons on whom the executive powers of civil government are devolved, the highest personages in the kingdom, there can be only one reply—by no means. Religion is as essential to *their* welfare, as it is to the welfare of their subjects. It constitutes their highest interest ; for “with God there is no respect of persons.” The fruits of the Spirit are certainly the most excellent qualities and ornaments of princes, and the exemplification of the various Christian virtues in the wide circle of their movements, could not fail of greatly promoting the cause of religion.

If we are to understand by the State, all those persons who transact, through its various ramifications of office, the business of government, comprising the executive, legislative, and judicial functions ; nothing can be more deplorable than that they should be without religion. Should they imbibe the pure spirit of the Gospel, and regulate their deportment according to its laws, how greatly might they advance the happiness of society ! We should not then hear political men enlarging on the duty and glory of defending the church, and, at the same moment, pouring contempt on the institutions of Jesus Christ, by habitually and boldly neglecting to observe them. The visible influence of religion in palaces and in courts, on legislators and men in high official stations, is an effectual means of recommending it to the world. What laws are by long experience

wholly inadequate to effect in aid of true piety, such honourable influence would assuredly recommend.

If by the State the great body of the people be intended, and if the consequence apprehended from unbounded religious freedom be, that the nation would soon be without religion; the consequence is unsupported by evidence; it is altogether chimerical, and contrary to historical fact. May not all the subjects of the state, including both legislators and common people, enjoy religion, yea even the religion of their own free choice, without the existence of any ecclesiastical imposition whatever? In the primitive churches, and among the first teachers of Christianity, when the kingdom of Christ was unincorporated with the kingdoms of this world, it is an incontrovertible fact that religion was in the very zenith of its prosperity and its glory. Then why do men talk of there being no religion in the nation, if ecclesiastical establishments were totally and for ever abolished? The objection is a mere ecclesiastical scare-crow, founded on party prejudice or worldly interest, and intended to frighten persons who do not, or who dare not, use their understandings to the full extent, upon all religious subjects.

If the reader take a glance across the Atlantic, where no such establishment exists, he will find that religion, so far from being annihilated, is in a state of great prosperity, among both governors and subjects. The same advantages and benefits may be equally enjoyed, with the abolition of all religious impositions, under any form of civil government, and in any country under heaven: it would be a public slander on our country and our laws, if it was said that these blessings could not be unrestrictedly enjoyed under the British constitution.

No human legislators are authorized to govern the consciences of their subjects, or to provide a religion for the people: this is the prerogative of God alone. Religion is important to the community only as connected with the sincere belief and profession of the individuals who compose the community. It is matter of personal conviction, not of civil obedience. It forms no part of the social compact, except as it constitutes the basis of individual character. It rests not on the authority of human legislation, but on the accountability of every soul of man to the tribunal of God.

If religious inquiry be proper for one rational being, it is proper for all intelligent creatures upon earth ; and if a religious profession be the choice of any individual, and as the result of mature examination of his religious tenets, it must, for the very same reasons which constitute its obligations, be acknowledged as the native right of every individual. Whatever is declared of the rights and obligations of one man, with respect to religion and to God, must be declared of the rights and obligations of all men. To examine, to choose, to believe, to practise for himself, in all religious matters, to the exclusion of human control, enter into the very essence of indispensable duty to God, no less than that of indubitable right. Authoritative influence is, therefore, of necessity exploded. No member of the community, however elevated in office, is entitled to say to another, " You must believe these articles of faith ; you must receive these forms of ecclesiastical discipline ; you must support this method of religious worship." What man or body of men is sufficiently authorized to use this language ?—that may thus propose his or their will as the measure of religious obligation to others ? The right of one person in all such matters, is exactly the same as the right of another ; and as the right is purely identical with individual accountability to God alone, all human prescription and authority in religion ought in justice to be excluded from society. This is precisely the state of the Christian religion as exhibited in the New Testament. It acknowledges no religious rights besides those which are individual and common to all men. Would the State, then, be without religion, if no connexion existed between civil and ecclesiastical polity ? Would there be no religion now in England, if the legislature were to abolish all penal laws on the score of religion, and allow Christianity to take its own course ? Would the evidence of Christian truth be impaired, would its excellence and beneficent character be less apparent, or would its divine efficacy as the means of good be diminished, by detaching religion wholly from human legislation ? Was there no true religion at Rome before the days of Constantine ?

A mere toleration, under any modification, must necessarily involve an infringement of human rights, and is, at best, only a palliation of injustice. It assumes what can never be in truth conceded, even that the permission to worship God is to

be accepted by man, as a favour from his fellow-man ; and that a religious profession must be held by *human grant*. It is, surely, to the last degree presumptuous to assign religion, in any of its articles, forms, or practices, to that class of things which man may dispense to man. That which men may bestow as an expression of their condescension and favour, they may without injustice withhold ; no one can claim it as a right ; it must be received as a *boon*. Is the belief of the Bible and worship of the God of heaven, then, a thing of this description ? With equal truth and equal justice may our creation, our life, our health, our salvation, our future misery, be assumed by man as objects and events absolutely under his control.

The purposes for which civil society is formed, are the only objects of which civil rulers can take cognizance. Their office is established in the community, only for the maintenance of political order and political good. The laws of civil government can have relation only to the external behaviour of its members, and are necessarily confined to temporal objects. As the offences which they may punish are purely civil ; so the order and obedience which they may enjoin, are exclusively civil. It is the state of the mind towards the community or any particular member of it, manifested by some *overt act*, that is the object of praise or blame, of reward or punishment, by the civil power : with the state of the *heart*, and the course of a man's life towards *God*, it cannot interfere : these are beyond its jurisdiction. The exercise of authority by the State is correct, when it is employed to found and support institutions of a political character, and to secure an equal share of political and religious privilege to all denominations not dangerous to the state ; but that authority is perverted and abused when it attempts to impose Christianity upon religious societies, which can never be formed on any other basis than that which is voluntary, and must ever be maintained by the spontaneous exertions of congregated individuals, without external coercion.

It is unquestionably the duty of civil rulers to regard with equal attention the whole political body, and to recognise the subjects of the state strictly as political persons. This duty may be discharged where no ecclesiastical establishment is sanctioned and endowed : it can never be performed where a par-

ticular modification of religion is incorporated by the civil power. This latter is an unnatural state of things, equally subversive of the subject's freedom, and incompatible with the obligations of the ruler. The latter must necessarily appear as unjust; and the former as oppressed. The favoured sect receives a consequence which tends to the degradation of others. Its ministers and members assume an importance over other religious teachers and professors; who certainly belong to the nation, though not to the church, are as useful in the community, as respectable in their character, and, therefore, ought not to be lowered in public estimation on account of their religion; which, so long as they are honest men, they can no more change than they can the colour of their skin, or the truth of God into a lie.

William and Mary brought with them principles and manners calculated to improve the English; but it soon appeared, that people so deeply debauched were not to be persuaded into a sincere love of reformation. These illustrious personages would have founded the government upon a much more liberal basis; but the ungenerous spirits which surrounded the throne obstructed the royal intentions. If the reader should inquire what became of the magnificent promises which churchmen, in their adversity, had made to the dissenters, he is to understand, that, since they had no further need either of their promises or of the dissenters, they were both disregarded. It was with great difficulty that the king could shelter his dissenting subjects from persecution; and when an attempt was made to reform certain abuses in the church, the clergy would not consent to the slightest alteration, lest the church should be charged with imperfection!

The actual state of religion, during this reign, was in some respects extremely melancholy. There was, indeed, some addition to the outward face of sobriety and virtue; to which the amiable piety of the king and queen greatly contributed. The disbelief of divine revelation, and the profane mockery of religion, became avowed and scandalous. Many of the clergy gave atheists no small advantage. They took the oaths, and read the prayers of the government; but they discovered so visibly their opposition to the administration, that many concluded they swore and prayed against their consciences, only

to secure their secular benefices. Notwithstanding the numerous efforts and societies formed for the reformation of manners, the country in general was in a lamentable state, both as to morality and religion; in so much that the better part of the nation were under fearful apprehensions of some heavy judgments from heaven.*

The new bishops were men of the highest order and respectability; who endured no small share of hatred and opposition from their enemies. For their humility, charity, and diligence in preaching and visiting their dioceses, their mortified habits, serious exhortations, and attempts to support the establishment by an attention to its best interests, with their moderation to the dissenters, they were despised, and represented as enemies and betrayers of the church.

There was in the discourses of the successors to the old non-conformists, a considerable portion of evangelical doctrine. They preached chiefly on the most important subjects; and the minds of their hearers were habitually recalled to the view of redeeming love. The efficacy of this was found to be incalculable. Their sermons contained much exposition of the holy Scriptures: they illustrated one passage by comparing it with another, and searched deeply into the meaning of the divine oracles. They were animated and affectionate in delivering the word of life; and God greatly honoured their labours, by making them instrumental in the conversion of many souls. As the number of their Christian societies increased, they were greatly edified and comforted.

The pious queen was a noble example of benevolence and devotion. The female part of the court had, in former reigns, given just cause of much censure; but she freed the court of all ground of suspicion, and recommended, by her example and influence, every thing that was amiable in her sex. Armed with the courage and firmness of a Christian heroine, she discountenanced every thing contrary to right principles and sound religion; and promoted to the utmost of her power, every thing tending to increase the happiness of the people, and the prosperity of the church of God.† The patriots in the state, and the true friends of the church, among all classes

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 101, 102.

† Ibid. p. 126, 134.

of protestants, hoped from her superior health, that she would have survived her husband; but, being seized with the small pox, accompanied by a malignant disease, she was snatched from their attachments and their hopes, December 28, 1694, in the thirty-third year of her age, and the sixth of her reign.

The good effects of a partial toleration were every where manifest. Universal peace and quietness were the happy result of the abolition of severe penal edicts in religion. No tumults or disorders were heard of in any part of the kingdom, after the act of toleration was passed. But, our author adds, "the far greater part of the clergy studied to blow up the fire, which seemed only to be covered with ashes."* While the best interests of men and Christians were thus endangered, king William, the terror of popery and despotism, fell a sacrifice to the king of terrors, March 8, 1702, in the fifty-second year of his age, having reigned little more than thirteen years.

This amiable and pious prince retains the highest character on the page of history. He firmly believed the truth of religion, and constantly entertained a deep sense of its importance. His tolerant spirit and principles, with his indifference to outward forms of worship, made him extremely obnoxious to the great body of the clergy. He appeared born for the purpose of opposing tyranny, persecution, and oppression. In his days, and by his efforts, the first permanent foundation was laid in Great Britain, of every thing valuable to society, or conducive to the propagation of undefiled Christianity.

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 247.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REIGN OF QUEEN ANNE.



SECTION I.

Infringements on the Act of Toleration.

ON the death of king William, the crown devolved upon ANNE, youngest daughter of king James, by his first marriage. Her reign was remarkable for *dangers* and *mercies*. The late king, whose reign was mild, just, and truly protestant, was not satisfied with securing the happiness of his subjects during his own life ; but looked forwards to distant ages, and transmitted to posterity that constitutional freedom which was in imminent danger, and secured to these nations a protestant succession of the illustrious house of Hanover. Notwithstanding these distinguished efforts, and flattering prospects, fresh difficulties and impediments were, during this reign, thrown in the way of a free toleration. These painful events, the faithful historian is constrained with grief to lay before the reader.

On her majesty's accession, addresses were presented from all parts of the kingdom ; and the dissenting ministers of the three denominations in and about London, waited on her majesty with the following address, which was delivered by Dr. Daniel Williams :

“ Most gracious sovereign—We, your majesty's most loyal and dutiful subjects, the protestant dissenting ministers in and about the city of London, crave leave humbly to present the deep sense we have of the unspeakable loss we and all your majesty's good subjects suffer by the death of our late glorious monarch William the Third. But herein we are most sensibly

and effectually relieved by your majesty's most happy and peaceable succession to these crowns, whose rightful and undoubted title we acknowledge with the greatest sincerity, and whose constant zeal for the protestant religion is so justly renowned: for all which, with unfeigned joy, we bless and adore the Divine Goodness. We farther beg leave to assure your majesty of our most dutiful affection, and inviolable fidelity to your royal person and government; not doubting of our share in the many blessings of your majesty's wise and happy reign, which we heartily pray may be long over us."*

Her majesty having graciously thanked them for their loyal address, promised them her continued protection, assuring them that she would do nothing to forfeit her interest in their affections. This could not fail to make favourable impressions on their minds, inspiring them with gratitude and confidence.

The queen at first made no great alteration in public affairs, but pursued those measures which her royal predecessor had so happily begun, effectually to secure the liberties of Europe. She openly declared upon the dissolution of the parliament, "that she should always wish that no difference of opinion among those who were equally affected to her service, might be the occasion of heat and animosities; and that she should be careful to preserve and maintain the Act of Toleration, and set the minds of all her people quiet." Upon the re-assembly of the two houses, she said—"This being our first meeting in parliament, after the loss of our late gracious sovereign, we cannot forbear to condole his death with the most tender and sincere expressions of gratitude and esteem. He was the great deliverer of these nations, the defender of the protestant interest, and the support of the general liberty of Europe. You have so often testified your sense of his great actions, by your dutiful acknowledgements, that I need not insist upon it: for while religion and liberty are of any value, king WILLIAM's memory must be in perpetual honour!"†

The spirit and principles of churchmen were particularly manifest in the higher circles of society, especially in the house of commons. The queen having afterwards declared, "that she was resolved to defend and maintain the church as by law

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 276.

† Ibid. p. 284, 285.

established," without any mention of toleration, the house was inspired with fresh courage, and complimented her highness, saying, "Your majesty has been always a most illustrious ornament to this church, and has been exposed to great hazards for it; therefore we promise ourselves that in your majesty's reign, we shall see it *perfectly restored* to its due rights and privileges, and secured in the same to posterity; which is only to be done by divesting those men of the power, who have shown they want not a will to destroy it."* As might be expected, this address excited very serious and just alarm in the minds of all the true friends of Christian freedom; but subsequently, affairs took a direction very different from the general expectation, by means of which these clouds of darkness were dispersed.

The queen, at her accession, found herself surrounded by a ministry of king William's choosing, who had the power in their hands, and enjoyed the confidence of that part of the nation which approved of the revolution. Time, therefore, must elapse, favourable circumstances must occur, and suitable persons for her purpose must be raised up, before she could place herself in the hands of such men as would be more congenial to her wishes. The toleration act had hitherto been regarded by its enemies with an eye of jealousy and aversion. But the happy effects of it were so apparent, the act was so much the object of national reverence, and it appeared so strongly engrafted into the constitution as settled at the revolution, that every idea of a repeal was precluded. Those who enjoyed the liberties and benefits of this act were to be attacked, during the prevalence of high tory influence, in a different quarter; and in the very first year of her majesty's reign, a bill was brought into parliament to abridge their religious freedom, by putting a stop to *occasional conformity*. It was some years, however, before it passed the two houses, and obtained the royal assent.

A very trivial occurrence had in the late reign roused the zealots of intolerance to great indignation. Sir Humphrey Edwin, while lord-mayor of London, being a dissenter, carried the *regalia* of the city to a meeting-house at Pinner's-hall.

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 295.

This needless act being considered as a very heinous crime, generated the most improper feelings in the breasts of many zealous churchmen. This unimportant circumstance kindled the flame of religious contention, and made it blaze to a height which it is not now easy to conceive. It ought, however, to be considered as a pretext, rather than as a cause. An occasion of quarrel was sought, and here it was found.

In tracing the matter to its source, it will be discovered in the dispositions of a considerable party, both of the clergy and the laity. King James, by the precipitate measures which he adopted to introduce the Romish faith, completely terrified his own protestant clergy, who fancied that they already saw a popish hierarchy usurping their functions and their benefices. To preserve their station was an object which lay very near their hearts. Feeling their need of the dissenters to take their side against Rome, they readily embraced them, and made them the most ample promises, as already stated from authority that will not be disputed. The prince of Orange having chased king James and the fears of popery entirely away, together with the terrors of thousands of the clergy, their goodwill to the dissenters, which they so warmly felt in the day of their adversity, was presently forgotten, while the dissenters were thankful for a toleration of their religious worship. After the supposed boon had been granted, many of them repented, and concluded they had superabounded in kindness.

King William's known principles, together with their influence on public opinion, supported by a body of men of liberal minds and superior talents, among the nobility, gentry, and higher orders in the church, restrained their malevolence, and kept things in a tolerably easy state during that monarch's life. He was no sooner dead, than many persons of high principles awoke from their apparent slumber, when the dissenters were again treated with persecution and violence. Those who had before bore them ill-will, and had reflected upon them on all occasions, now openly triumphed, and indulged their outrage. Their hands had been tied; but now they concluded they were at liberty to do what they pleased, and talked of nothing less than a total extirpation of them. This was the common subject of conversation in the metropolis, and in various parts of the country. Their first object was to pull down their places

of worship, as not fit to be suffered ; and at Newcastle-under-Lyme, on the arrival of the news of the king's death, they immediately commenced the disgraceful work.* The spirit of intolerance was equally manifest in the parliament, when steps were immediately taken for the abrogation of the act of toleration.

The episcopal clergy were now distinguished by the names of HIGH CHURCH and LOW CHURCH. All who treated the dissenters with temper and moderation ; who resided constantly on their cures, and laboured diligently in their ministry ; who expressed their zeal against the pretender, and their approbation of the revolution, were stigmatized as secret favourers of presbyterianism, enemies to the church, and low churchmen. They were said to be in the church only while the law and the preferments were on their side ; but that they would forsake it, as soon as a favourable opportunity offered. With these false and invidious characters, says Burnet, did the high party endeavour to load all those who refused to come into their measures and designs.

The university of Oxford was unhappily successful in corrupting the principles of the youth sent there for their education ; in so much, that few of them escaped without contamination, the generality of the clergy being not only ill-principled, but ill-tempered. They exclaimed against all moderation as endangering the church ; but their own folly and ill-humour, which they infused into all persons over whom they had influence, was the real occasion of public heats and contentions. The convocation continued their former ill practices ; but, since they were not much regarded, they met with very little opposition. They drew up a representation of some abuses in the ecclesiastical discipline, and the consistorial courts ; but took care not to mention any of those greater enormities, of which many among themselves were awfully guilty : as pluralities, nonresidence, neglect of their cures, with the visible irregularity of their lives.†

With the majority of the clergy, who thus envied the people their liberty, a considerable number of the country gentlemen, and many of the nobility concurred. The influence

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 276. † Burnet, vol. ii. p. 347, 380.

of an established priesthood over the higher ranks of society, was found extremely prejudicial to the diffusion of Christian piety and religious freedom. A clergyman was usually the tutor of their youth, and the companion of their maturer years: he soothed their solitude, and partook of their convivial hours. Their ideas on a variety of subjects they derived from his early instructions, and by him a tone of thinking was infused into their minds which mingled itself with all the sentiments and conduct of future life. Persons of strong minds, from the force of reflection, and an extended intercourse with men, might shake off the baneful influence; but this mental degradation followed too many of them to their graves. Nor should this pernicious clerical influence on females, in the superior walks of society, be unnoticed. The power which the clerical office, a liberal education, a highly cultivated mind, and elegant manners, had upon the fair sex, was both commanding and extensive. They, in like manner, influenced their husbands, but especially their children, their relatives, and a numerous class of acquaintance and dependants, by which they spread far and wide the opinions of the clergyman, the prime mover of the whole. Such, at all times, and in all countries, must be the actual state of things in a considerable degree, when the clergy are placed in too lofty a situation: but this lamented evil existed ten-fold more in the reign of queen Anne, than in the present day.

That there were individuals who shone with distinguished lustre, by their great intelligence and liberality, is attested by the most faithful records. With the greater part, however, the case was widely different. The very office of a clergyman, without regard to personal character, carried with it a degree of weight and importance not easily to be conceived by those who have lived to behold the present improved state of society. From various important causes, the charm of mere office is now broken, and real character is generally considered as an essential qualification: whereas, formerly, a mere official character carried with it almost irresistible force.

Such was the spirit among the superior orders of society and a majority of the clergy, when queen Anne's accession flattered their hopes of bringing back the days of Charles II., by stripping dissenters not only of their religious toleration, but

of their legal existence. The first step was to bereave them of every office under government ; and then to disable them from being employed in future. When thus humbled, they could more easily be crushed. This was manifestly the tendency and design of the two memorable ecclesiastical enactments, which, during this reign, passed the two houses of parliament, and obtained the royal assent. There was, indeed, a plausible pretext as a cloak to conceal the deformed nakedness of these odious measures. When Christ was to be condemned to the death of the cross, the chief priests and elders must needs find him guilty of blasphemy and treason—an enemy to both church and state. When the dissenters were to be spoiled of the blessings of toleration, some colourable reason must be held out, upon which men would look with confidence, or with conscious innocence, or even with meritorious rectitude, while they came forwards and argued in its defence. “The church is in danger,” a cry as old as the days of the scribes and pharisees, served the purpose admirably well ; and the cry of “hypocrisy against dissenters,” who took the sacrament at church to qualify themselves for civil offices, was deemed a meritorious service. If these scrupulous persons could, with a safe conscience, take the sacrament sometimes at church, it was concluded that they should be compelled to take it always, or not at all ; and it was deemed high time to have a legislative regulation upon a point so insignificant.

These gross notions were the effects of ignorance, prejudice, or misrepresentation. Occasional conformity had been practised by the principal persons, ministers and others, among the presbyterians, who composed by far the largest portion of the dissenters, from the first passing of the act of uniformity. That same year the principal ministers held a meeting in London, and agreed to exercise their public ministry as they found opportunity ; but that they would continue to attend occasionally on the services of the church of England, and communicate at her altars. This was their common practice, both in town and country, during the intolerant reigns of Charles and James, when they had no prospect of worldly benefit by such conduct. Some indeed continued it after the revolution, and were actually found in this practice, when the bill to prevent them was introduced, without any regard to the

dignities or emoluments of civil office. The venerable names of Baxter, Howe, Bates, and P. Henry sanctioned the practice by their approbation and example.

In consequence of these ideas, notwithstanding the corporation and test acts, there were always dissenters in corporations and in offices under government; because these acts required them to do nothing more than they had frequently done when in private life. But while they joined occasionally, they did not choose to confine themselves entirely to the ministrations of the national church. They preferred the dissenting mode of worship, government, and ministry; therefore with them they fixed their stated communion, as members of their separate churches. When the revolution enabled dissenters to erect places of worship, and to hold their assemblies publicly, the persons who attended them were more easily observed and known. All these things were particularly offensive to the patrons of intolerance; who embraced the earliest opportunity of putting a stop to these supposed abuses.

This was not all their criminality, nor the sole cause of the introduction of the occasional bill. As an additional reason for the adoption of the measure, those of the clergy who were less liberal wished to engross all the honours and emoluments of the country; and so were alarmed at the increase of the contrary party. The dissenters, as a body, were highly respectable for talents, character, and influence; so the political party, into which they threw their weight, derived from them a considerable accession of strength.

The bill against occasional conformity was brought into parliament, one session after another, till at length it passed, and obtained the royal assent, under this specious title: "An act for preserving the protestant religion, by better securing the church of England, as by law established, and for confirming the toleration granted to protestant dissenters." It made some few concessions in support of toleration; but then it enacted, "that if any person or persons, either peers or commoners, civil, military, or naval officers, or any person in any other public office or trust, shall, at any time after their admission into their said offices or employments, knowingly and willingly resort to any conventicle, assembly, or meeting, where there shall be ten persons or more assembled together,

over and besides the household, if it be in a house where there is a family inhabiting, or if it be a house or place where there is no family, then where any such ten persons are so assembled ; or if they shall be present at any such meeting as aforesaid, where her majesty and the princess Sophia, shall not be prayed for in express words according to the liturgy of the church of England, they shall forfeit *forty pounds*, and every such person shall be adjudged incapable of bearing any office or employment whatsoever under her majesty. Provided always, that if any such person shall, after such conviction, conform to the church of England, for the space of one year, without having been present at any conventicle, assembly, or meeting, and receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper, according to the rites and usage of the church of England, at least three times in the year, every such person shall be capable of any office or employment as aforesaid ; and upon his admission to such office or employment, he shall take an oath of all these particulars, which oath shall be enrolled and kept on record."

To prepare the public mind for the reception of this act, numerous sermons on high church principles were preached, and multiplied bitter pamphlets were circulated against the rights and liberties of the people. That men of high principles, who had never concealed their enmity against Christian freedom, should introduce and pass such a bill, was naturally to be expected. It was the boon which they had promised to the high party, and which they at length secured to them.

In three days the bill passed the lords, and was transmitted to the commons, who, in as short a time returned it, with the addition of a penalty of forty pounds on conviction of the offender being at a dissenting meeting, to be paid to the informer. This statute was extremely oppressive, and the ruin of many thousands of worthy subjects. From the revolution, great numbers of dissenters, conceiving themselves secured by the pledges of the toleration act, entered into offices under government, were extensively employed, had acquired the habits of their stations, and were unable to obtain support for themselves and their families in any other way. By this new law, they were nearly all ruined, while the strength of society and the sinews of government were in the same degree relaxed and weakened.

Bishop Burnet having been exceedingly zealous against the bill in its earlier stages, takes a great deal of credit to himself for his opposition, and that of a majority of the bishops ; but he relates the last agitation of the subject very briefly, and with much apparent satisfaction. How much tranquillity of mind, and philosophical calmness men display, when their neighbour's interests, not their own, are at stake ! When the act passed, he says, it passed " without the least opposition," either from whigs or tories ; and he thus concludes his account : " All the excuse that the whigs made for their easiness in this matter, was that they gave way to it, to try how far the yielding of it might go towards quieting the fears of those who seemed to think the church was still in danger till the act passed ; and thereby to engage them to concur with them in those important matters which might come before them. It must be left for time to show what good effect this act may have on the church, or what bad ones it may have on dissenters."*

The French and Dutch protestants petitioned to be heard against the bill, and to be exempted from its baneful operations ; but no attention was paid to their requests. The dissenters made application to Harley the treasurer, whose family was chiefly among the presbyterians, and who himself had lived in communion with them during the greater part of his life : but it was of no avail. Is he then a complete statesman, whose political principles make all religious and humane considerations submit to their dominion ? While indignation is roused at the view of tyranny on the throne, by the abandonment of virtuous maxims, political wisdom must condemn the narrow-minded policy of civil rulers, who deprive the community of the services of any one class of subjects, and prevent men of superior talents, of tried integrity, and of extensive influence, from bringing all these into operation for the public welfare. May the time soon arrive, when, in every nation, a regard for the prosperity of all shall gain complete ascendancy over the unreasonable prejudices of political zeal and religious bigotry ! Is it not remarkable that those who have most strenuously supported the doctrine of restrictions, and have been almost petrified with terror at persons of different religious denomi-

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 585, 586.

nations from their own being admitted to public offices, have seldom expressed any fears of danger from the admission of men who have no religion at all? Are they beguiled by their religious, their selfish, or their political principles? Surely those who have no religious principles to restrain them from disobedience and urge them to duty, must be the most injurious to the community, and may justly be considered as persons to be universally dreaded.

The degradation which the patrons of freedom suffered from this unnatural statute, must have been felt by them as the grossest insult; and considered as an act of the most flagrant injustice to the body, by depriving them of the capacity of attaining situations and offices to which they had an equal right, and equal ability, with the rest of their countrymen. From the measure of injury sustained by those who were in places under government, and their families, with those who were educated for the possession of them, they certainly had reason to complain of improper usage. As to the rest, how wickedly soever it was intended to effect their ruin, it might be converted into a benefit. Those who were contented to let others enjoy public offices of trust and profit, and could direct their attention to the employments of social life, found a suitable recompense. Agriculture, trade, manufactures, and commerce presented full scope to talents, and held out to industry the most ample rewards. The independence, too, which these pursuits conferred, lead to a satisfaction and dignity of mind, as well as to a comfort in outward circumstances, which no one, who correctly estimated the enjoyments of life, could expect to find in public situations. In most of these the rewards of labour are scanty, and far inferior to those of men industrious in business: and in those where the emoluments are great, as they depend on the nod of a minister, or his dependents, to bestow; so the continuance depends on his good pleasure; and when he is disposed to take offence, whether justly or unjustly, he can take them away. Things being placed in these circumstances, no large share of Christian freedom was allowed by those in power, or claimed and practised by those who were dependent upon them: nor will man's religious rights and liberties be properly recognised, till the imaginary connexion between a religious profession and a secular office shall be totally dissolved.

A celebrated writer, in his examination of the occasional bill, asks, how will this determination of an English parliament stand in the annals of future ages? How will wiser posterity blush for such progenitors! Can it be supposed that a nation will always continue intoxicated? Or if it ever become sober, will it not be amazed that there ever was a time when a few ceremonies, of which the best that could be said was that they were *indifferent*, had enough in them to outweigh all religion, all morality, all intellectual endowments, all natural and religious rights; and that all these should be overbalanced by the height of profaneness, the contempt of religion, the dregs of debauchery, and all the villanies of an impure life? Those who engrossed all the legal emoluments must have believed that there was a God in heaven, who bore ample testimony of their large promises at the revolution; but they now forgot their promises, and, without abating a hair's breadth, required all others to conform in every punctilio, or they must become infamous to the nation, and the scorn of posterity.

The queen and some of her courtiers, it seems, were not very forward to adopt this oppressive law; and, after repeated repulses, some years elapsed before it could be accomplished. Their coldness and tardiness on this occasion made a deep and gloomy impression on the minds of the patrons of intolerance; and "the clergy over England, who were generally inflamed with this matter, could hardly forgive the queen and prince:" and no wonder this was their unhappy feeling, since it is added, that "there appeared at this time an inclination in many of the clergy to a nearer approach towards the church of Rome."*

The press was not altogether silent on this occasion. While the occasional bill was pending, Daniel De Foe published a smart piece, entitled, "The Shortest Way with the Dissenters; or, Proposals for the Establishment of the Church." It was an ironical performance, intended to expose the bigotry and rancour of men of high notions, and to show the lengths which some of them were disposed to go against the contrary party, upon the accession of queen Anne. But his irony was not universally understood, and his design was mistaken even

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 364, 603.

by some of the sons of freedom. The leaders, however, of the high party sufficiently comprehended his meaning; and, by their influence, a prosecution was commenced against him, and a proclamation published in the gazette, offering a reward of fifty pounds for his apprehension. Complaint was also made of his publication in the house of commons; when it was resolved that the book was full of false and scandalous reflections on the parliament, tending to promote sedition; it was, therefore, ordered to be burnt by the hands of the common hangman. When De Foe found with how much rigour both he and his book were treated, he at first secreted himself; but his printer and bookseller being taken into custody, he voluntarily surrendered himself, being resolved, as he said, "to throw himself upon the favour of government, rather than that others should be ruined for his mistakes."

The author was at length brought to trial; and, upon his own confession that the piece was written by him, he was found guilty of composing and publishing a seditious libel, and was sentenced to be imprisoned, to stand in the pillory, to pay a fine of two hundred marks, and to find sureties for his good behaviour for seven years. This, for such a publication, my author adds, was a very infamous sentence, and reflected much more dishonour upon the court by which it was pronounced, than upon De Foe on whom it was inflicted. He endured the pillory with great fortitude; and, during his confinement in Newgate, he defended himself with great spirit against repeated attacks from the press. In one of his pieces, he says—"I have not been a man of vice; and whatever malice may have the ill-nature to suggest, I venture to say, without pride, no man can charge me with it." His superiors seemed to have been conscious of the injustice of his sentence. He was released from prison by the kind interposition of the secretary of state; and the queen having examined the circumstances of his case, sent lord Godolphin with a considerable sum of money to his wife and family, and also transmitted money to him in Newgate, to pay his fine, and the expenses of his discharge.*

While the queen testified her concern for suffering huma-

* Biog. Britan. vol. v. p. 54—58.

nity, she declared her resolution to maintain the act of toleration, without suffering her attachment and zeal for the church of England to be in the least diminished. Her majesty delivered her sentiments to the two houses of parliament, in these words: "I hope that such of my subjects as have the misfortune to dissent from the church of England, will rest secure and satisfied in the act of toleration, which I am *firmly resolved to maintain*; and all those who have the happiness and advantage of being of our church, will consider that I have had my education in it, and that I have been willing to run great hazards for its preservation; therefore they may be very sure I shall always make it my own particular care to encourage and maintain this church as by law established, and every member in his just rights and privileges. And upon all promotions to ecclesiastical dignities, I shall have a very just regard to such as are eminent and remarkable for their piety, learning, and constant zeal for the church; that by this and all other methods which shall be thought proper, I may transmit it securely settled to posterity."*

Notwithstanding these royal assurances of her majesty's care and protection of the church of England, the common clamour of the clergy was, "the church is in danger." With great zeal and industry they infused this notion into the heads of the people; and at the public elections of the members of parliament, their alarming apprehensions of the church were reiterated in every quarter. The two universities were equally inflamed with the same spirit, and, with much vehemence, took all methods to propagate the same notion throughout the kingdom. The cry of the church's danger, was as the word of command to an army; and the different classes of men were known according to the answers they returned.

These senseless clamours and alarms were at length brought under examination before the parliament; when, as my author adds, "it was acknowledged that the church was in danger: there was an evil spirit and a virulent temper spread among the clergy; many indecent sermons were preached on public occasions; and those hot clergymen, who were not the most regular in their lives, raised factions in many dioceses against

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 302.

their bishops. These were dangers created by those very men, who filled the nation with this outcry, while their own conduct produced real and threatening dangers." This parliamentary discussion was closed by a vote, carried by a great majority—"That the church of England, under the queen's happy administration, was in a safe and flourishing condition; and that the spreaders of these reports of danger, were enemies to the queen and her government!"*

This was a severe, but just censure of men in holy orders. We shall cease to wonder at these proceedings when the true spirit and character of the clergy is more fully developed. This is done by the author last cited, the truth of whose testimony there can be no reason to question. "I see a spirit rising among us," says he, "too like that of the church of Rome, of advancing the clergy beyond their due authority, to an unjust pitch. This heightens jealousies and prejudices against us, rather than our real authority; and it will fortify the designs of profane infidels, who desire nothing more than to see the public ministry of the church first disgraced, and then abolished. Unless a better spirit possess the clergy, arguments, laws, and authority, will not prove strong enough to preserve the church; especially if the nation observe a progress in that bias, which makes many so favourable to popery, and so severe against the dissenters."†

The clergy now sitting in convocation betrayed their high tone of feeling, and pronounced their heavy censures upon all who dissented from the national church. They considered all such persons as disqualified for instructing the rising generation; and even resolved, "that for any person to keep and maintain schools or seminaries for the education of youth, in principles contrary to those of the established church, is a contempt of the ecclesiastical laws of this kingdom, is of a pernicious consequence, and serves only to continue and widen the unhappy *schisms* and divisions in the nation!"‡ This was the decree of that reverend and venerable assembly, which was so remarkably distinguished for its factious and refractory behaviour, not only against the primate of England, but also

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 425, 436.

† Ibid. p. 640, 641.

‡ Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 357.

against the supreme guardian of the church; as the account is fully related by our historian.*

Under all the obloquy cast upon the patrons of Christian freedom, they were firm to their principles, and unblameable in their lives. They approached the throne in language not unworthy of their character, nor displeasing to their prince. Upon the duke of Marlborough's famous victory at Ramilies, the presbyterians, independents, and baptists, presented their fervent congratulations, addressing her majesty in these words:

“We gratefully acknowledge the share we have in the blessings of your majesty's auspicious reign, which preserves to us both our civil and religious liberties; and take this occasion to renew to your majesty, the assurance of our inviolable fidelity, to which not only our interest and inclination, but the sacred ties of gratitude and conscience oblige us. And we shall use our utmost endeavours, in our several stations, to promote that union and moderation among your protestant subjects, so often recommended by your majesty, as highly necessary to the common safety. May the divine providence, which has made your majesty not only head of the protestant interest, but chief in the confederacy for the glorious cause of common liberty, give your majesty the satisfaction of seeing both more firmly established than ever, by the influence of your counsels, and the success of your arms.”†

The dissenters in Ireland bore their share of slander and persecution, and, if necessary, the reader might be furnished with numerous instances most disgraceful to the country. These intolerant and unhallowed measures were warmly opposed by the government; and when the parliament of that country passed a law “to prevent the growth of popery,” the lord lieutenant addressed the two houses, saying—“It is not the law now passed, nor any other law, that will secure you from popery, whilst you continue divided among yourselves; it being demonstrable, that unless there be a firm friendship and confidence among the protestants of this kingdom, it is impossible for you to be either happy or safe. I am directed to declare to you, as her majesty's fixed resolution, that as her majesty will always maintain and support the church, as by

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 441—443.

† Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 374.

law established ; so it is her royal will and intention, that dissenters shall not be persecuted or molested in the exercise of their religion.”*

The affairs in Scotland wore a melancholy complexion During the conflicts in the south, the parliament in the north introduced a bill “for toleration to all protestants in the exercise of religious worship.” The bill being read, a strong representation was offered against it, in the name and at the appointment of the general assembly, concluding with these remarkable words : “That they were persuaded, that to enact a toleration for those of the episcopal way, which God in his infinite mercy avert ! would be to establish iniquity by law, and would bring upon the promoters of it, and their families, the dreadful guilt of all those sins and pernicious effects which might ensue thereupon !” This clearly discovered their infatuated, presbyterian bigotry, which, as a curious historical fact, deserves to be transmitted to posterity.

The Scotch episcopalians, now under the rod of the dominant party, were particularly solicitous to avoid giving any offence to the presbyterian leaders, and no less fearful of opposing on this favourite point the voice of the general assembly. In consequence, therefore, of this detestable bigotry, the perpetual characteristic of an assembly of dominant priests, the bill was lost :—the court possessing too much discretion, in the midst of its political difficulties, to involve itself in a new theological quarrel in the north. The intolerant presbyterians were not content with this odious victory over justice and humanity. They subsequently passed an act for preserving the true reformed religion, and the only government of Christ’s church within their kingdom. In another, ratifying the acts of a former parliament, it was declared to be *high treason*, to attempt by writing, speaking, or by any other open act, to alter or innovate the claim of right, or any article thereof, in that which related to the establishment of the presbyterian government in Scotland. It was strongly objected on this occasion, that the import of such a peremptory clause would be of dangerous consequence ; and that it was calculated to ensnare the subject, and to bind up the wisdom of government from

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 427.

making those alterations and reformatiions, which, from the variation of time and circumstances, might be judged necessary. One of the members said, "that the shire of Aberdeen, which he had the honour to represent, was of the episcopal persuasion; and he desired to know whether, in case this act should pass, his countrymen could address the sovereign or parliament for a rectification of the present establishment, without incurring the penalties of high treason." To this Sir William Hamilton replied, "that the act in contemplation did not indeed preclude addressing for a toleration; but he acknowledged, that, if it passed into a law, a declaration that the presbyterian government was wrong, and that episcopacy ought to be restored, would amount to high treason!!" In the conclusion, this memorable act passed, and stands on record as a monument of presbyterian oppression and cruelty as durable as time.*

The Scotch parliament afterwards, in direct opposition to the clamour and alarm of the general assembly, passed an act of toleration, prohibiting the execution of the judicatories of the kirk, which was by this means divested of its temporal terrors; and, as its spiritual censures have gradually fallen into disesteem, it is now only the phantom of its former self.†

SECTION II.

The Subject continued.

THE situation of religious freedom became every day more and more perilous. The tories affected to distinguish themselves as the only true friends of church and state; and despised, with considerable disgust, all who differed from them in religious opinions. They considered them as encroaching schismatics, who disgraced and endangered the hierarchy; and those of their own communion, who recommended moderation, they branded with the epithets of lukewarm Christians, betrayers of the church, and apostates from Christ. They resolved to approve themselves the zealous sons of the church,

* Belsham, vol. ii. p. 198.

† Ibid. p. 362.

by seizing the first opportunity in their power to oppress the contrary party. To pave the way for this meditated persecution, sermons were preached, and pamphlets printed, to blacken their character, and inflame the popular resentment against them. Some of the clergy carried their opposition even to frenzy; and as their number increased, they exerted their eloquence to the utmost in preaching, not only against the dissenters, the whigs, and the ministry, but even against the queen, and all who took the side of moderation. They expatiated at large upon the old principles of the commonwealth, and the dire misfortunes of king Charles; when he that betrayed the greatest degree of bitterness, and filled his flock with the most alarming apprehensions, was most applauded by the party.*

While the dissenters rejoiced in the security afforded them by the toleration act, an event occurred which they could neither foresee nor prevent; and which exposed them to almost innumerable injuries, arising from a system of determined hostility to the best interests of man. The instrument of this mournful dispensation, was Henry Sacheverell, D. D. chaplain of St. Saviour's in Southwark. By nature, he appears to have been endowed with those peculiar qualities and dispositions which exactly fitted him for the champion of the party. The whig writers speak of him with uncommon severity, and place him degradingly low, both in talents and virtues. They style him a bold insolent man, with very little religion, virtue, learning, or good sense.† His excellencies were in another way. He had a fine person, a melodious voice, a graceful and impressive delivery. The fire of zeal for the church of England, in all its most extravagant claims, burnt hot in his breast as Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. His system allowed, nay, enjoined it as one of the first duties, to hate all who were not within her pale, so as to employ every opprobrious epithet to express his hatred: and he seems to have framed a collection of them for use in his sermons on the fifth of November and thirtieth of January.

An overweening conceit appears to have been born with him. Arrogance, self-sufficiency, a contempt and hatred of all who did not accord with his vices, marked his character,

* Biog. Britan. vol. v. p. 55.

† Burnet, vol. ii. p. 537.

and were developed in his practice. He was appointed to a small living in Staffordshire, where his peculiar cast of mind soon appeared. His restless soul was agitated day and night; his fury could not be restrained, but must be vented, as soon as a proper object was found. He reflected with great bitterness on the memory of king William; he condemned the revolution; exercised fury against the whig administration; used, in these attacks, the most severe language; and seemed to court notice by provoking suffering.

Oxford was, on different occasions, the theatre of his prowess, which he exhibited there before a multitude of congenial souls. Growing bold by approbation, he appeared as preacher of an assize sermon at Derby "on the communication of sin," which procured him an increased measure of public notice. The adherents of the tory party in London hearing of his fame, called him up to be the champion of the metropolis. At St. Paul's, on the fifth of November, 1709, he delivered a sermon before the lord-mayor and the court of aldermen, on 2 Cor. xi. 26, which he entitled, "The Perils of false Brethren both in Church and State." Sir Samuel Gerrard, who was the chief magistrate that year, expressed the warmest approbation of the sermon: but when he proposed to the aldermen to have it printed, they refused their consent. Sacheverell, however, published it with a very flattering dedication to the lord-mayor; and so eagerly was it sought after, that forty thousand copies were sold in the space of a few weeks. By the tories it was extolled to the skies, as a performance which proclaimed its author to be worthy of a bishopric: the whigs thought it was worthy of the flames, and its author to suffer the severest punishment. He gave full vent to his fury, in the most virulent declamation that he could devise. He asserted the doctrine of nonresistance in the highest strain possible. He poured his furious scorn and scurrility on the dissenters, and reflected severely on the toleration; affirming that the church was violently attacked by her enemies, and feebly defended by her pretended friends. He animated the people to stand up in defence of the church, for which, he said, he sounded the trumpet, and desired them "to put on the whole armour of God."*

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 538.

This being the true, but contemptible character of Sacheverell's sermon, there must have been a high degree of pre-disposition in the tories, when this sermon could rouse and charm them : and, on the other hand, there was nothing so remarkably pointed that any of the whigs needed to apply it to themselves, or be offended at the author. As to what he said against dissenters, that was meekly to be borne : thousands of sermons preached on the thirtieth of January have been more severe ; and certainly he is unworthy of the name of a dissenter, who cannot read such performances with patience, and pity. The church whigs had still less cause of displeasure, and appear to have been extremely reprehensible for their irritability. Let the reader represent to himself a man, whose ideas of priestly dignity and power were very little inferior to the church of Rome ; who was displeased at people of a different communion enjoying toleration, because he conceived that his own church should fill the whole land ; who was provoked almost to madness to see every subject, theological and ecclesiastical, discussed with freedom daily from the press, and he will have a correct picture of Dr. Henry Sacheverell, the celebrated high church hero. If left alone, he is a very harmless animal to others, though he may be exceedingly troublesome to himself.

Because a liberal-minded prince had sheathed the sword of persecution, which for nearly thirty years had been destroying pious Christians, this ecclesiastical firebrand, envying their peace and liberty, raised the senseless cry of " the church is in danger ;" though from what quarter, seeing she was fenced round by articles, canons, and penal laws at every avenue, and seeing she enjoyed the protection of the civil sword, and was supported by a powerful and interested priesthood, posterity is at a loss to conjecture. The creature that possesses a soul so contracted as to proscribe all divine worship, which is not offered in a manner agreeably to its own limited apprehensions, is unworthy of the name of human, and merits, in a high degree, the infamy of " a troubler in Israel." It was from such troublesome spirits as these, to whatever denomination they belonged, and not from real Christians, who were the quiet of the land, that the kingdom of the clergy was in danger.

Sacheverell's cause was brought into parliament ; when heavy complaints were made against him. So strangely were their

minds heated with the subject; and with so high a hand were things carried, that it was determined to impeach him of "high crimes and misdemeanors." A committee of the house, consisting of some of the first characters for talents and respectability, was appointed to draw up articles of impeachment from the sermon. They were prepared, approved, and carried up to the lords, who acceded to them, and directed preparations to be made for the trial. Four heavy charges were brought against the doctor. He was accused of maintaining, "that the means of effecting the late revolution were odious and unjustifiable:—that the toleration of dissenters was unreasonable and unwarrantable:—that the church of England was in imminent danger under the queen's administration:—that the measures of the government tended to the destruction of the constitution."* In order to conduct the trial with greater solemnity and publicity, Westminster-hall was ordered to be fitted up for the purpose.

The clergy most fervently espoused Sacheverell as their champion, who had stood in the breach; and so they reckoned his cause their own. They employed their influence to alarm and inflame their hearers, while emissaries were appointed to work on the minds of the populace who were already sufficiently prone to discontent. These provocations of the people succeeded far beyond expectation, and excited an unusual ferment both in town and country.† The whole body of the tories ranged themselves under his banners. Some of them entered most cordially into all Sacheverell's views, while others felt nothing of cordial attachment to the man, but hoped that, by professing zeal for the safety and prosperity of the church, they might be enabled to drive out the whig administration, and govern in their place. It was a great disappointment to them, that the reins of authority had not been put into their hands at her majesty's accession; they were, therefore, the more anxious to improve the present opportunity to their own advantage. So well did these political men perform their parts, especially by the assistance of the clergy in their pulpits, that the minds of the multitude were wrought up almost to phrensy.‡

* Sacheverell's Tryal, p. 4. † Burnet, vol. ii. p. 540. ‡ Clarke, vol. iii. p. 60.

The whigs perceived their error too late ; and before the trial commenced, they were sensible of having brought themselves into a perilous situation. How to mitigate the evil, and, if possible, render it productive of benefit to themselves and their cause, was the object of close deliberation. It was resolved so to bring forward all the great principles of the revolution and liberty, that, by contending for these, they might interest the public in their favour. But their scheme was in vain : a passion for liberty was unable to contend with the passion for intolerance.

The trial having commenced, was managed, on the part of the commons, with singular ability by Sir Joseph Jekyll, General Stanhope, Sir Peter King, and above all by Sir Thomas Parker, who entered with his whole soul into the business, and brought his superior talents to bear on Sacheverell, and the sentiments which he maintained.

This was a fine opportunity for defending the revolution, and refuting the odious doctrines of passive obedience and nonresistance, which, said the bishop of Oxford, “ are more frequently and earnestly asserted and urged, both from the pulpit and the press, *than all the duties of Christianity!*” The learned prelate remarked, “ If to resist upon any occasion whatever, be unlawful, be rebellion, damnable rebellion ; then the revolution was rebellion, and all that were concerned in it are involved in that guilt ; then we have continued in rebellion ever since ; then if we would avoid damnation, we must repent of that sin.” His lordship concluded by declaring —“ In my opinion, these practisings of clergymen in state matters are of that dangerous tendency and consequence, that if there be not some effectual stop put to these practisings, these practisings will, in time, put an effectual end to our constitution.”*

Sir Joseph Jekyll said, “ The whole tenor of king James’s administration was agreed by all to be a total departure from the constitution ; the nation was united in that opinion, except the criminal part of it. As the nation agreed in judgment of their disease, so they did in the remedy. They saw there was no remedy left but the last ; and when the remedy took place,

* Bishop of Oxford’s Speech, p. 10—12.

the whole frame of the government was restored entire and unhurt. This showed the excellent temper of the nation at that time, that after such provocations from an abuse of the regal power, and such a convulsion, no one part of the constitution was altered, but the whole received new life and vigour. My lords, I shall conclude this head by noticing the form of prayer appointed by public authority, for the *fifth* of November, now doubly memorable," being the day on which king William landed, as well as the gun-powder plot. "There is in that form not only thanks to Almighty God for the Revolution, but for the success given to those means that were used to bring about that wonderful deliverance; what else is the meaning of *thanking God* for giving his late majesty," king William, "a safe arrival here, and making all opposition fall before him till he became our king and governor?"*

General Stanhope, alluding to those who still adhered to the doctrine of passive obedience, said, "Now I pray, my lords, what are the peculiar and distinguishing characteristics, the favourite and darling tenets of these men? What else but passive obedience, *Jus Divinum*, an hereditary, indefeasible right of succession, which no necessity, no act of parliament, no prescription of time, no natural or legal incapacity, can ever invalidate or set aside? If they are in the right, my lords, what are the consequences? The queen is not queen: your lordships are not a house of lords, not being summoned by a legal writ: We, for the same reason, are no house of commons: All the taxes which have been raised for twenty years have been arbitrary and illegal extortions: All the blood of so many brave men, who have died, as they thought, in the service of their country, has been spilt in defence of a usurpation; and they were only rebels and traitors."†

To enter into a particular relation of the trial, does not coincide with the plan of this work, and would occupy too much room. An ample account is given in most of the histories of the times. When the managers of the commons had brought their accusations, and having entered into an elaborate defence of the revolution, and the principles of civil and religious liberty, Sir Simon Harcourt, and the other advocates for Sa-

* Tryal, p. 50.

† Ibid. p. 75.

cheverell, appeared in his defence. With much ingenuity and judgment they eluded the force of the arguments which his accusers had adduced, by allowing their truth, and acknowledging their weight. Instead of saying any thing against the revolution, the toleration, or her majesty's ministers, they only insisted that the doctor did not speak against these, and that his words conveyed another meaning. They justified the discourses as inculcating general duties, without descending to notice particular exceptions. After his counsel had concluded the defence, he read a well-composed vindication of his conduct, which had been drawn up for him. It was uttered with all the boldness and confidence with which nature had so eminently endowed him. He affirmed that he had always spoken respectfully of the revolution, of king William, of the protestant succession, and of the queen and her government. He strenuously asserted the doctrine of passive obedience and nonresistance, as being the doctrine of the church in which he was brought up, and at whose altars he had officiated. He concluded with many pathetic expressions, designed to move the audience to compassion, and with the most solemn asseverations of his innocence, in the sight of God who searcheth the hearts of all men. This, says a contemporary writer, while it excited the multitude to pity him, filled with inexpressible horror those who knew the man, and his ordinary conversation: they could not help being shocked to behold his hypocrisy, and hear so many falsehoods, with such solemn appeals to God.* After a full investigation of the business for the space of three weeks, he was found guilty of the charges brought against him, by a majority of seventeen lords; and their sentence was, that his sermons at Derby and St. Paul's should be publicly burnt by the hands of the hangman; and he be prohibited from preaching for the space of three years.†

During the time of trial, the doctor lodged in the temple, and went every day to Westminster in a coach, attended by an immense assemblage of people, who strove to kiss his hand, and to pay him the most abject obeisance. Those of a superior rank, from their windows and balconies, gave him demonstrations of their respect and attachment. So zealous were

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 542.

† Tryal, p. 326.

his adherents to his cause, that they compelled the passengers in the streets to do him honour, and to shout the watch-word of the party, "the church and Sacheverell." Members of parliament were reduced to the same necessity. They surrounded the queen's sedan, in her way to the house of lords; and, to impress her with their sentiments, they cried—"God bless your majesty, and the church; we hope your majesty is for Dr. Sacheverell." Even the clergy testified their approbation of his doctrines and conduct, by surrounding him at the moment of trial, and extolling him as the champion of the church; and the queen could not refrain from some indications of partiality towards a man, whose doctrines were so favourable to the royal prerogative.*

The next step was to vent their fury against those whom they considered as enemies to the church of which Sacheverell was the champion. The houses of the managers, and some of the bishops and the most zealous of the peers, were threatened with destruction. They vowed vengeance against the house and church of Dr. Hoadly, who had, on several occasions, defended the revolution and the liberties of the people.

Their heaviest wrath fell on the dissenters, who had taken no part in the business. These celebrated heroes for the church, like their brethren in former ages, united zeal and robbery: they plundered their houses, and, though they abhorred their faith, had no objection to a share of their goods. Their places of worship felt the heaviest weight of this infuriated bigotry. They began with Mr. Burgess' meeting-house, in Cary-street, London, and having torn down the pulpit and the pews, committed them to the flames in Lincoln's-inn-fields, clamorously crying, "high church and Sacheverell." Mr. Earle's meeting-house, in Long-acre; Mr. Taylor's, in Leather-lane; Mr. Bradbury's, near Fleet-street; Mr. Wright's, in Black-friars; and Mr. Hamilton's, in Clerkenwell, shared the same fate. Threatenings were uttered against many others, which would no doubt have been put in execution, had not a stop been put to their lawless violence. Nor was the rabble alone concerned in these excesses: they acted under the influence of men of elevated rank, who were seen directing their operations

* Clarke, vol. iii. p. 60.

and encouraging them by approbation and reward. But they were checked in the midst of their career; and, by the spirited exertions of the queen's guards, their enormities were suppressed, and peace was restored.*

During these violent extravagances, Sacheverell was surrounded, and his cause espoused by the clergy, the queen's chaplains standing his firm friends. The heads of the tory party appeared as his patrons; caressed those of his brethren who were the warmest in his interest; and, by their elegant hospitalities, animated them to still greater exertions in his favour. The doctor displayed his appropriate character. Not an inch of the self-sufficiency and arrogance which had hitherto accompanied him in his progress, did he lose in Westminster-hall. He scowled on his accusers with contempt and disdain. In consulting with his friends, he betrayed that arrogance of conceit, and assurance of petulant infallibility, which rendered it difficult for them to conceal their disgust and chagrin. The acclamations of the multitude he received with an air of haughtiness, blended with self-complacency, as an honour inadequate to his merits. It is said, that he set himself up in all companies as an oracle on every subject, whether relating to church or state; and his decisions must neither be contradicted nor called in question. This fiery zealot after all, instead of being the head, was only the contemptible tool of the party.

The decision of the lords certainly furnished just cause of triumph to Sacheverell and the tories: for supposing him to have been really guilty, how small must the offence have been considered, which three years' abstinence from preaching was sufficient to expiate. He was everywhere received by his friends with ecstasies of joy, as if he had obtained a signal victory. Bonfires and illuminations testified the universal exultations of his adherents; and those who would not join in their ridiculous demonstrations of gladness, suffered for their firmness. The flame spread through every part of the country, and the advocates of religious liberty unhappily found ridicule and reproach to be the lowest kind of suffering. Their personal safety was in many places endangered, their houses injur-

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 542.

ed, and their places of worship threatened, mutilated, and destroyed. These direful effects of their wrath were felt not only in London, but at Exeter, Sherbourne, Cirencester, Oxford, Gloucester, Pontefract, and other places. One of their places of worship at Bristol was pulled down, and the materials cast into the river.

Sacheverell's journey into Wales, which happened some months after his trial, in order to take possession of a living, while it displayed the height to which party spirit was raised, proved an additional source of uneasiness to the friends of liberty. In the places through which he passed, he was received with little less than regal splendour. Hundreds, and, in some parts of the country, thousands of men in arms attended him from town to town. The clergy paid him their homage with the most endearing cordiality, as the champion of the church, and of their order. The magistrates appeared in all the insignia of office to receive him into their precincts: while the tory nobility and gentry welcomed him to their mansions, and treated their guest with the most distinguished honours.* Wherever these demonstrations of attachment were displayed, there appeared at the same time a spirit of hatred and revenge against his and the church's enemies, being considered as one. In this unhappy state the dissenters were placed, without having the least share in this business. Their persons, families, habitations, and, above all, their places of worship were exposed to the most serious injuries, violence, and destruction. The sting in the souls of such men remains longer, and is productive of more pernicious consequences to the peace and welfare of the country, than superficial observers can conceive.

A^{*} very insignificant circumstance, we see, will sometimes set a whole nation on flame, especially when the skill and strength of the clergy are exerted. The ignorance of the common people, and many of those above them, are deplorably great. Ignorance, the fruitful mother of bigotry and false zeal, when united with a proportion of superstition, constitutes that religion which may be promoted by blasphemy, robbery, and debauchery, whose ardour may be increased by intoxication and excesses.

* Clarke, vol. iii. p. 61.

The sufferings which the friends of liberty endured, were only the beginning of sorrows. It was the object of the tories to have crushed them entirely; and such would most probably have been the effect, since it was the design of Sacheverell's triumph, had not death interposed and performed his friendly act, that by one stroke of his hand he frustrated all the purposes and wishes of their enemies.

Queen Anne regularly attended Sacheverell's trial. Her heart, from nature and education, was with the tories. Circumstances had hitherto kept her in the hands of the whigs, who are accused of not having treated her with all the respect that was due. The timidity of her natural disposition, and the fear of evils from a change, had hitherto detained her in their power. Their arguments on the trial were not much calculated to gratify her taste. To be told that she derived her authority from the people; that her best title to the crown depended on acts of parliament; and that in case of oppression subjects might resist, and dethrone the tyrant, were political dogmas which it required a far stronger mind than Anne's to relish and approve. On the other hand, the assertions of Sacheverell and his adherents, that rulers derive their power from God, are accountable to him alone, and that resistance of their authority in any case, exposed men to eternal damnation, must have been sweeter to her taste than honey from the honeycomb. The marked attachment which so large a portion of the people showed for the supporters of these opinions, and the odium which fell so heavily on the advocates of Christian freedom, as materially to affect their wealth, character, and influence, emboldened the queen to shake off the party, under whose direction she had hitherto acted, and to throw herself into the arms of the tories.

A step so bold and important, could not be effectually taken without a new parliament, which was deemed necessary to an entire alteration of the system. The measure was considerably facilitated by that tone which the trial of Sacheverell gave to the public mind. The clergy performed their part, displaying their zeal and influence from the pulpit, in private discourse, and by obtaining candidates who were zealous for Sacheverell and the church.* This is the testimony of bishop

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 554.

Burnet, whose office and situation enabled him to judge and write with undoubted certainty on this subject. A tory ministry, and a tory house of commons, were Sacheverell's bequest to his country. When, therefore, the proclamation was issued for a new parliament, all England was in an uproar; and was so inflamed by these wild churchmen, that their fury, says my author, was to determine the members for the house of commons and their elections, without any regard to the rights of the electors. The canvassings and elections were conducted with such feuds as England had never witnessed; and in many places they were carried with open violence. Dr. Sacheverell employed the whole of his time and pains in this business: he made his progress through the country, and was looked upon as another Hercules for the church militant. Religion was considered as the only popular cause; and through an infatuated zeal for the support of it, were all these feuds raised in procuring votes: this was the funeral of the government, and of public liberty!*

A parliament thus chosen and elected, was capable of answering any purpose. Its operations, as might be expected, presently created universal alarm among her majesty's best subjects. The queen was veering in the same direction. In her speech to the parliament, instead of promising to maintain the toleration, she only said she would maintain the *indulgence* granted by law to scrupulous consciences: this change of phrase into Sacheverell's language was received with great satisfaction by the parliament, and was a fresh impulse to the zeal of the party.†

When the act against occasional conformity had passed, the dissenters might naturally suppose that they had then felt the worst, especially as one of the clauses declared, "that the toleration should remain inviolable in all time to come." If truth should be banished from the common intercourse of men, it ought to continue honoured in parliaments, courts of justice, and on thrones. It is exceedingly to be lamented when this is not the case; and it is painful for the historian to record the occurrences of such a season of deep depravity. By the late parliamentary enactment, it might have been supposed that

* Biog. Britan. vol. iv. p. 567.

† Burnet, vol. ii. p. 558.

enough had been done for the protection of the church against the very shadow of danger. But something more was found necessary. The firm attachment of the dissenters to the principles of civil, as well as religious liberty, filled the breasts of the other party with determined rancour; and, as they could not hope to gain them over to their party, they were resolved to crush them by successive legislative enactments: thus, while they avoided the odium of any one violent act, they were firmly fixed to accomplish their endeared object. This had been the policy employed against the protestants in France, and they had witnessed its complete success.

Such was the reasoning of political men, who, like Pharoah of old, said, "let us deal wisely." It was the purpose of Pharoah and his ministers of state, to extirpate the Israelites as a distinct people; and, in order to accomplish it, they framed a decree, that the male children should all be murdered. A more refined policy prevailed in the cabinet of queen Anne. Having agreed on the ruin of the dissenters, their determination was to deprive their children of an education according to their own principles: so that, unless they chose them to remain ignorant and untaught, they must receive their instruction from masters whose principles they disapproved, as destructive of their own. Julian, the apostate, had adopted this refined barbarity against the Christians; conceiving, no doubt, that ignorance would prepare their minds for returning to the absurdities of paganism. Julian's writings have been the delight of every infidel, and were undoubtedly the oracles of the man in whose breast the famous *schism bill* originated. The infidel, St. John, again stood forwards as the champion of the church of England; and, as he had been called up to the lords by the title of viscount Bolingbroke, Sir William Windham brought the bill into the lower house on the 12th of May, 1714.

This new bill was entitled, "An Act to prevent the growth of Schism, and for the further Security of the churches of England and Ireland, as by law established;" and it enacted, that no person should keep any public or private school, or seminary, to teach or instruct youth, as tutor or school-master, unless he subscribed this declaration; "I, A. B. do declare that I will conform to the liturgy of the church of England, as by law established," and shall have obtained a license from the arch-

bishop or bishop, or ordinary of the place, under his seal of office. And whosoever should be found doing this without these qualifications was, upon conviction, to suffer three months imprisonment. No license should be granted, unless the person produced a certificate that he had received the sacrament according to the usage of the church of England, at some parish church, and within the space of one year. If, after this, the school-master should be found present at any religious assembly, or at any other place of worship than the church of England, he was to be imprisoned three months, and from thenceforth he was incapable of teaching in any school or seminary, or instructing any youth as tutor or school-master.

The next clause deserves to be inserted in the very words of the act: "And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that if any person, licensed as aforesaid, *shall teach any other catechism than the catechism set forth in the Book of Common-prayer*, the license of such person shall from thenceforth be void, and such person shall be liable to the penalties of this act."* Any person who, for the foregoing offences, had lost his license, in order to his being capable again of acting as a school-master or tutor, he was required to make oath in a court of justice, that, during the space of twelve months, he had not been present at any dissenting place of worship, and had received the sacrament three times during the year, according to the usage of the church of England.

Such was the nature of the schism bill, the severity of which must shock the feelings of every ingenuous reader. Severe as it appears, it is said to have been incomparably more so when it first came out of the hands of Bolingbroke and his coadjutors: but Harley had expunged the harshest and most persecuting clauses. The bill was strenuously supported, and vigorously opposed in the commons; but the opposition was fruitless, and after warm debates it was passed and carried up to the lords.

From the revolution to the accession of the house of Hanover, reason, justice, and moderation, had more powerful advocates among the peers than in the house of commons. The celebrated lord Cowper firmly opposed the bill, and said—"No

* Neal, vol. v. Appen. p. 119.

man was more ready than himself to do every thing that was necessary for preventing the growth of schism, and the security of the church ; but that this bill was so far from answering the title of it, that, in his opinion, it would have a quite contrary effect, and prove equally pernicious to church and state. Instead of preventing schism, and enlarging the pale of the church, this bill tended to introduce ignorance, and its inseparable attendants, superstition and irreligion. In many country towns, reading, writing, and grammar-schools, were chiefly supported by the dissenters, not only for the instruction and benefit of their own children, but also those of poor churchmen ; so that the suppressing of those schools would, in some places, suppress the reading of the holy Scriptures.”*

The weakness and injustice of the bill was further stated by the earl of Wharton, who, with his usual irony and pleasantry, thus exposed its absurdity and severity. “ He was agreeably surprised to see that some men of pleasure were on a sudden become so religious, as to set up for patrons of the church : but he could not help wondering, that persons who had been educated in dissenting academies, whom he could point at, and whose tutors he could name, should appear the most forward in suppressing them : that this was but an indifferent return for the benefit the public had received from those schools, which had bred those great men, who had made so glorious a peace, and treaties that executed themselves ; who had obtained so great advantages for our commerce, and who had paid the public debts without any burden or charge to the nation : so that he could see no reason there was to suppress those academies, unless it were on apprehensions that they might still produce *greater* geniuses, who should drown the merits and abilities of these great men. My lords, the noble earl adds, to be serious, it is not less melancholy than surprising, that at a time when the court of France prosecutes the designs long since laid, to extirpate our holy religion, when not only secret practices are used to impose a popish pretender on these realms, but men are publicly enlisted for his service : it is melancholy and surprising, I say, that at this very time, a bill should be brought in, which cannot but tend to divide protestants, and

consequently to weaken their interest, and hasten their ruin : but then the wonder will cease, when it is recollected what *mad-men* were the *contrivers* and *promoters* of this bill.”*

The learned bishop Fleetwood, remarked upon this bill, “ that, if to deprive parents of the right of educating their children, in the way they thought best, was not persecution, he knew not what was ; and that the way to judge of such matters was to bring the case home to ourselves, and to suppose that others believe themselves to be in the right as much as we do.” If this excellent rule were duly observed, very few in such cases would form a wrong judgment. Some persons have pleaded for a code of education to be established by law, and for placing the instruction of children under the direction of the magistrate. Should this visionary scheme ever be attempted, it will soon be found, like many other schemes, to be attended with unspeakably greater inconveniences, and with much fewer advantages, than that of leaving the business in those hands where God and nature seem to have placed it. The measure could not fail of meeting with the warmest opposition from all parents ; who, whatever might be their opinion in the case of others, would have their judgments corrected by their feelings, when the case was their own, and when the *heart* was consulted. If parents may be deprived of the right of educating their children in the way they best approve, they may be deprived of a right founded in nature, and in parental affection, by which they are constituted their children’s guardians, and are entitled to superintend and direct their education during their minority.

The dissenters petitioned to be heard by their counsel against the bill, but their petition was rejected. Lord Halifax moved, that they might be allowed schools for the instruction of their own children ; but the motion was lost. Two clauses were, however, gained in their favour : one was, that the dissenters might be permitted to have school-mistresses to teach their children to read ; and another still more important, that this act should not extend to any person who should instruct youth in reading, writing, arithmetic, or any part of mathematical learning which relates to navigation and mechanics only. The inflicting of the penalties, which was taken out of the hands of

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 554.

the justices of peace, where the commons had proposed to place it, and committed it to the cognizance of the superior courts, afforded some additional alleviation. On the third reading, an exception from the penalties of the bill was proposed and obtained, for every person employed by any nobleman, or noblewoman, to teach in their families, provided he did, in every respect, qualify himself according to the act, except only in that of taking a license from the bishop. The bill was made to extend to Ireland. So powerful was the opposition, that it was carried by a majority of seventy-seven only against seventy-two.

On this memorable day, twenty-two temporal peers, and five bishops, entered their protest against it as the only possible remaining mark of their determined opposition and disapprobation. They openly denied and proved, that not the least danger could arise to the church from the dissenters; nevertheless, they said, "if the dissenters were dangerous, severity is not so proper and effectual a method to reduce them to the church, as a charitable indulgence. Severity may make them hypocrites, but not converts. If severity could be supposed to be of use; yet this is not a proper time for it, while we are threatened with much greater dangers to our church and nation, against which the protestant dissenters have joined, and are still willing to join, with us in our defence; therefore we should not drive them from us, by enforcing new laws against them. This must be the more grievous to the dissenters, because it was little expected from the members of the established church after so favourable an indulgence as the act of toleration, and the repeated declarations and professions from the throne, and former parliaments, against all persecution, which is the peculiar badge of the Romish church.

"It is not even pretended that this bill is designed as a punishment of any crime which the protestant dissenters have been guilty of against the civil government; or that they are disaffected to the protestant succession, as by law established: for in this their zeal is very conspicuous. In all the instances of making or executing the laws against dissenters, it is very remarkable that the design was to weaken the church, and to drive them into one common interest with the papists, and to join them in measures tending to the destruction of it. This

was the method suggested by popish counsels, to prepare them for the two successive declarations in the time of king Charles the second, and the following one issued by king James the second, to ruin all our civil and religious rights.

“ We cannot think that the arts and contrivances of the papists to subvert our church are proper means to preserve it; especially at a time when we are in more danger of popery than ever, by the designs of the pretender, supported by the mighty power of the French king, who is engaged to extirpate our religion, and by great numbers in this kingdom who are professedly in his interests. If the dissenters should not be provoked by this severity to concur in the destruction of their country, and the protestant religion, yet we may justly fear they may be driven by this bill from England, to the great prejudice of our manufactures: for, as we gained them by the persecution abroad, so we may lose them by similar proceedings at home.”*

On the twenty-fifth of June, the Schism bill received the royal assent by commission; and its extraordinary operation was to commence on the first of August following. Archbishop Dawes took the chair in order to model and finish this iniquitous bill. Bromley at the same time published the church's design of excluding, in another session of parliament, all denominations of dissenters from their rights of voting at public elections, and of being magistrates of corporations. All these things were done for the church, with a view to enjoy its zealous and active assistance in overturning the state.

The clergy had no inconsiderable share in these great national transactions. “ Indeed it was but too visible, that the greater part of the clergy were in a very ill temper, and under very bad influences: enemies to the toleration, and soured against the dissenters.”† At the same time, on the good assurances mentioned above, the pulpit and the press applauded the scheme of giving up the fruits of our national victories, and of leaving the house of Bourbon in possession of wealth and power, terrible and dangerous to the liberties of Europe. The surrender of the nation to the dominion of a popish pretender, was the notorious purpose intended to be accomplished.

* Bogue and Bennett, vol. i. p. 276. from Tindal. † Burnet, vol. ii. p. 526.

Having no sense of danger from such a prospect, this was the general hope and expectation of the greatest churchmen; and according to their views, peace became desirable as it was preparatory to the introduction of hereditary right. Promoting the welfare of the church, in the judgment of those who called themselves the only true churchmen, did not import the promotion of piety and virtue, or the discountenance of immorality and profaneness; but it meant something grievous and oppressive to all men of liberal principles.

It will be difficult in the annals of the British legislature to specify a law more exceptionable than this, or which did less honour to the heads and hearts of those men, by whose influence it obtained a place in the statute-book. In the conflicts of the party, success was accompanied with no inconsiderable triumph; but the measure remains as an indelible stain on the names of men, who might otherwise have been entitled to the esteem of posterity. The want of integrity, with the sacrifice of every noble and generous principle, in order to gain some crooked party ends, or ends less honourable to man, strips the courtier's robes, and exposes his Ethiopian skin.

The dissenters had, from the revolution, peacefully and thankfully enjoyed the benefits of toleration; and they were neither intriguing against the government, nor giving it the least uneasiness. In these circumstances to bring forward and pass a law for their destruction, discovered neither great statesmen, nor men of liberal minds. There was something in the measure inexpressibly odious, severe, and hostile to common sense. To deprive parents of the right of educating their own children, and of the power of committing them to the tuition of persons of their own principles, and their own choice, would have dishonoured a Hildebrand, and would not have been out of character in the successor of St. Dominic. To forbid ministers or school-masters to teach any other catechism than that in the Book of Common-prayer, which is extremely defective and imperfect; to expose persons teaching any other, however excellent, to such heavy penalties; and utterly to disqualify them for the future exercise of their office, betrayed a littleness of mind, much more suitable to a monastery of Carthusian friars, than the two venerable bodies, the lords and commons of Great Britain! To deprive of their support, a considerable

number of persons who had dedicated their time and talents to the instruction of youth, and reduce them and their families to unavoidable beggary, without any crime or cause, unveiled the state of their hearts as callous and insensible to the sufferings of humanity. To discourage learning at a time when perhaps two millions of the population were unable to read ; to frame such a law, after a promise had been given by the queen, and both houses of parliament, that the act of toleration should remain inviolable ; and to do all this at the instigation of unprincipled infidels, and manifest enemies to the state, presents a picture inexpressibly reproachful to the intelligence, virtue, liberality, and Christianity of that age.

To break in upon man's liberty in the indifferent things of life, was considered as an encroachment on the rights of society ; so to break in upon it in *religious* matters, which were not injurious to another, was looked upon not only as a species of encroachment called persecution for conscience, but as a flagrant usurpation of the divine prerogative over the minds of men. Governments could have no rightful power over men's professions or practices upon points of this nature, because governments could not in any wise affect men's sentiments. Penalties, which were all the force governments could exert over their subjects, had not the least tendency to alter men's opinions : all that they could do was to restrain men's open professions or public practices. To restrain their professions or practices upon points not at all injurious to others, when they could not conscientiously act otherwise or alter their belief, tended, it was thought, only to compel men to become hypocrites, or to believe one thing, whilst they professed and practised another. This tended equally to the destruction of men, who were thus tempted to hypocrisy, and to the destruction of all government, by loosing men from the ties of their consciences, which always afford the best security to a government for the true obedience of its subjects.

To enjoy secure freedom from oppression was considered as the natural right of every man's conscience, and professedly admitted to be so by every consistent protestant ; and to prevent as much as possible every infringement upon it, would, it was said, most effectually display the wisdom and promote the prosperity of the state. Whatever religious tenets men

embraced, so long as they did not violate the laws of civil society, they were declared to be entitled to the protection of the civil power, and might justly claim the privilege of worshipping God according to the convictions of their consciences. Why, it was asked, might not the Jew erect his synagogue, the Hindoo his temple, the Mahometan his mosque, if his fidelity and allegiance were unquestionable? If they might all claim equal and unrestricted liberty, and not be suppressed by the sword of the state, but by the sword of the Spirit, by persuasion, not violence; and if this was the method prescribed by the Gospel for the conversion of those who erred from the truth; how much more ought all who professed the faith of Christ to be permitted the free exercise of their own understandings and consciences, respecting those articles of faith, and forms of worship, which they might judge most conducive to their own edification!

The servants of Christ, it was affirmed, had all equally a right to judge for themselves in matters of religion. As Christ was the common Lord and Master of all, and they were all equally bound to regulate their religion by his holy Word; therefore they were bound to study it for themselves, and no one could, without gross presumption, pretend to impose or enforce his own opinions upon another. It was pleaded that men were expressly forbidden to judge or censure one another on account of any existing differences in religion. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. Let us not, therefore, judge one another any more." If then it were wrong to censure and condemn others for difference in matters of religion, it was argued that it was much more wrong to prescribe their religion for them, to threaten and punish them for not believing other men's opinions. All men had an uncontrollable right to inquire for themselves, to form their judgment upon evidence, to profess openly their religious opinions, to adopt those modes of worship which appeared to them to be right. It seemed unnecessary to prove, that persons who must give an account of themselves at last, have a right to judge for themselves now.

These were honourable principles; but honourable prin-

ciples could not prevail. The court ministers having adopted fresh measures, showed by the foregoing unnatural statute their unblushing enmity against the patrons and cause of religious freedom : but death stood their firm friend. On the first of August, 1714, the day on which the operation of this act was to commence, queen Anne gave up the ghost, in the fifty-first year of her age, and the thirteenth of her reign !! Thus, at this remarkable juncture, she resigned her crown and government to a family, whose successive monarchs have now, for upwards of a century, uniformly displayed themselves the friends of toleration, and of religious liberty. In consequence of this change, the scandalous statute was never carried into effect. Bolingbroke was driven to do penance for his crimes in France, and the earl of Oxford committed to the tower.

It is readily acknowledged, that queen Anne reigned with great honour for several years, and her glories would no doubt have shone with equal or greater brightness to the end, had they not been eclipsed by evil counsellors, and the base designs of others, under a pretended zeal for the church, and for the prerogative of the crown. If an overruling providence had not interposed to prevent conceived mischiefs, it is difficult to say what dreadful scenes would not have followed. Might not our civil and religious privileges have been destroyed ; posterity have inherited popery and slavery ; and bloody wars have ravaged and spread destruction in every corner of the land ? With these melancholy prospects, God again signally interposed to favour afflicted Britain ; all their counsels were turned into foolishness ; and their deep laid designs entirely overthrown.

In briefly noticing the state of religion during this period, it would have given the historian unspeakable pleasure to have recorded a favourable report ; but, alas ! it was in general at a very low ebb. A summary view of the moral and religious state of England, at the close of this reign, is given by bishop Burnet, who, as he lived through these times, and was a strict observer of passing events, may be considered, on the whole, as a competent and impartial judge. The commonalty were happy in their circumstances, but inconceivably ignorant of religion. The dissenters possessed a much larger share of knowledge, than those who resorted to the churches. This is

pronounced as wonderful, considering the plainness with which religious instruction was communicated, and the number of cheap little books dispersed over the nation ; but these methods of religious instruction completely failed, no doubt, from want of evangelical sentiments, not being inculcated with a Christian spirit and in scriptural language ; for this ignorance seemed to be obstinate and incurable.

The men of trade and business were the best part of the nation. While the lower classes were involved in a kind of brutal ignorance, and those who attended to agriculture cared for nothing else, the inhabitants of trading towns and cities, were not only generous and sober, but endowed with knowledge, zeal, charity, and devotion. In the metropolis, the pride of wealth, and love of luxury much prevailed ; yet among the citizens, with all their faults, was found the flower of the nation, and in this class were many firm friends of religious liberty.

The gentry were the worst instructed, and the least acquainted with religion, of any persons of their rank, our author had witnessed in any country. They were ill-taught, ill-bred, haughty, insolent, and ignorant of religion. After they had forgot their catechism, they acquired no new knowledge but from plays and romances. They soon found it a modish thing, which looked like wit and spirit, to laugh at religion and virtue, which rendered them crude and unpolished infidels. They could give no better reason why they hated and despised those who separated from the church, than the papists for hating heretics. Instead of being taught at the university to love their country and constitution, its laws and liberties, they were disposed to love arbitrary power, and even to make themselves slaves to absolute government : provocation or a change of interests might induce them to act for the public welfare ; but, as they had no principle of love to their country, or of public liberty, they were easily brought into a state of slavery, if they might only become the tools of the despot.

The nobility and gentry, grown tired of the semblance of religion, abandoned the practice of keeping chaplains ; and “ I do not much wonder at it,” he adds, “ when I reflect on the behaviour of too many of these chaplains, light and idle,

vain and insolent, impertinent and pedantic ; by which the worship of God, and the instruction of servants, is quite neglected. I have lamented all my life, that I saw so little true zeal among our clergy. I saw much of it in the clergy of the church of Rome, though it is ill-directed. I saw much throughout the foreign churches ; the dissenters have a great deal among them : but I must own that the main body of our clergy has always appeared to me dead and lifeless, and, instead of animating one another, they seem to lay one another to sleep. Without a visible alteration, they will fall under universal contempt, and lose both the credit and fruits of their ministry. Many of them have so strong a bias towards popery, and are so severe against the protestant dissenters, that, unless a better spirit possess the clergy, arguments, laws, and authority will not prove strong enough to preserve the church from ruin.”*



CHAPTER V.

THE REIGN OF KING GEORGE I.



SECTION I.

The Government favourable to Religious Toleration.

THE arbitrary maxims of government adopted by the Stuarts, have been sufficiently illustrated through the reigns of four successive monarchs. On the abdication of the last of these misguided princes, a solemn compact established the

* Burnet, vol. ii. p. 638—655.

grand principles of the constitution, under restrictions favourable to the liberty of the subject, without being in any degree injurious to the just authority of the prince. The advantages of the revolution had been fully appreciated during the reigns of William and Anne ; after which, according to the order of succession, prince GEORGE of Hanover, was proclaimed king of England, to the inexpressible joy of all true protestants. This happy change gave new life to the protestant interest, not only in England, but throughout Europe. The accession of this illustrious prince was particularly favourable to the cause of religious liberty. He protected toleration, befriended all classes of Christians, and execrated every species of intolerance. To the unspeakable honour of his character, and the ineffable joy of all his best subjects, these were the prominent and governing characteristics of king George the first.

The toleration enjoyed previously to the accession of the house of Hanover, was established at a very critical moment, when the nation was in a state of universal agitation ; and, at this awful juncture, a wise and energetic prince acted according to his own enlightened views, which were far too liberal for the great mass of the people. Religious freedom, therefore, like premature fruit in an unfavourable clime, held a precarious existence, depending upon his life by whom it was introduced ; so that, upon his removal by death, his successor had nearly deprived Britain of this palladium. The same kind providence which had already saved our country by one foreign prince, again interposed and rescued the nation by another, when the house of Hanover was employed to perfect what had been commenced by the house of Orange.

The king, upon his arrival, openly avowed his sentiments by this declaration in council :—" I take this occasion to express to you my firm purpose, to do all that is in my power for supporting and maintaining the churches of England and Scotland, as they are severally by law established ; which, I am of opinion, may be effectually done without the least impairing the toleration, allowed by law to protestant dissenters, so agreeable to Christian charity, and so necessary to the trade and riches of this kingdom." This awakened the gratitude and joy of the friends of religious freedom, upon which they presented their fervent congratulations from every part of the

kingdom. None appeared with more unfeigned joy and cordial satisfaction, than the dissenters of the metropolis, when the body of their ministers went to court, with Dr. Daniel Williams at their head, who, in their name, presented the following address to their monarch :

“ May it please your majesty—With thankfulness and joy, equal to the great occasion, we congratulate your majesty’s peaceable accession to the throne, and your own and the prince’s safe arrival ; the merciful return of many ardent prayers.

“ When we recollect your majesty’s descent from the king and queen of Bohemia, those renowned patrons of the protestant religion, we cannot but adore the divine Providence, which has now rewarded their sufferings for that cause, in their royal offspring with a crown, that renders your majesty the head of the whole protestant interest. Your majesty’s zeal for the same religion, your known affection for the liberties of Europe, and the rights of mankind, with your celebrated virtues, gives us the surest prospect that the blessings of your reign will be as extensive as your power.

“ The parliamentary entail of the crown upon your illustrious house, we have ever esteemed one of the greatest blessings procured for us by our late deliverer king William, of immortal memory. To this happy settlement we have steadfastly adhered against all temptations and dangers. Our zeal herein has been owned to be very conspicuous, by those noble patriots who now surround your throne.

“ We hold no principles, but what do in conscience oblige us to acknowledge your majesty for our only rightful and lawful sovereign, and do every thing in our power to support your title and government against all pretenders whatsoever.

“ Your majesty’s wise and gracious declaration, for which we render our unfeigned thanks, does sensibly relieve us under our present hardships, and gives us ground to hope, that as we are inseparably united in interest and safety, with all that adhere to the succession and monarchy as by law established, so we shall share in that protection and favour, which will make us happy with the rest of your subjects.

“ We shall constantly pray for the long life and prosperity of your majesty, for their royal highnesses the prince and

princess of Wales, and all the branches of your august family. May that God, by whom kings reign, help you so to employ your mighty power and interest, that it may be your majesty's glory to protect the protestant religion, to suppress the profaneness of the age, to heal the divisions of your people, to assert the rights of the injured abroad, and to preserve the balance of Europe."

To this loyal address, the king returned this gracious answer: "I am very well pleased with your expressions of duty to me, and you may depend upon having my protection."*

His majesty's accession defeated the design of those in power, and excluded them from the great offices of the court; while king George ascribed the quiet possession of his throne to the opposite party, whom he took into his bosom, and cherished in the exercises of piety and liberty. The language of the government sanctioned, without hesitation, the former suspicions of the friends of liberty, by official declarations that the late ministers had been carrying on their dark design for the introduction of a popish instead of a protestant prince, to the ruin of the civil and religious rights of the empire. The Stuarts having made an unsuccessful effort to regain the throne, the preamble of the land-tax bill thus addressed the king: "The most implacable of your majesty's enemies will not attribute the late unnatural rebellion to any one act done by your majesty, since your happy accession to the throne of your ancestors; but they will allow that all the mischiefs, burdens, and calamities which shall attend the rebellion, are in truth owing to the pernicious counsels given by some persons in the late maleadministration; when, under pretence of procuring peace abroad, the present destructive war was projected to be brought into the very bowels of our native country at home, when a popish army was to be the protector of our holy religion!"† After this declaration from the government, it could not be deemed wonderful, that the friends of liberty should have a very low opinion of the tory machinations, and be under fearful apprehensions, that, as they gained the toleration by the exclusion of the Stuarts, they should be deprived of it upon their return.

* Crosby, vol. iv. p. 113.

† Histor. Regis. vol. i. p. 200.

Had the king imitated the air of unsuspecting candour which the tories acted so well, and abstained from insulting a fallen foe, he would have more completely rivaled them in policy, and might have ruled an unanimous people. But such wise and magnanimous conduct would probably have been less propitious to religious liberty, to which the tories had proved themselves deadly enemies; for if they had been admitted to a share in the early councils of the house of Hanover, they might have impeded the national return from the retrograde course which toleration had taken in the latter years of queen Anne; and might probably have prevented the rescinding of those acts which embittered the lives of the patrons of religious freedom, over whose heads the axe was suspended. It was, therefore, to promote the best interests of men, that king George set himself instantly and heartily to unravel the web, which his predecessor had employed her last days to weave, in order to entangle the consciences and subvert the rights of her subjects.

The act of toleration may be considered as one of those extensive leaps, which liberty sometimes takes in its progress to increase the happiness of mankind. Since that event the progress has been more gradual, and less perceptible; yet it has not been less efficacious, or less beneficial to society. Ever since the accession of the house of Hanover, the great principle of religious liberty, like imperceptible but irresistible leaven, has been diffusing itself through all ranks of society; and, unless men put out their eyes, and refuse the use of their understandings, it will be equally difficult to impede its progress, as to control the light and benefit of the sun. Truth, when once discovered, is invariably found to be beneficial to individuals and commonwealths, and is openly avowed and made known, as just to God, and beneficial to the world. The great principle of religious liberty is one of the most prominent and important truths in the religion of protestants, requiring all classes of men to allow unto others the same religious immunities as they claim for themselves; and forbidding them to be angry with their brethren for differing from them in matters of religious faith or worship. So far as men are influenced by this grand protestant principle, they believe and acknowledge all other persons to have the same indubitable right

to the liberty of conscience, as they have themselves; therefore, all honest men, endowed with this noble, philanthropic, protestant charity, will claim this liberty as their invaluable birthright, and, with unbiassed minds, allow others to do the same.

The cordial reception and practical influence of this principle is not remotely connected with the peace of individuals, and the happiness of society. The differing peculiarities among the various denominations of Christians, must be allowed to remain till men's minds become better enlightened; they will do very little harm to themselves; they will do none to the general interest of protestants, and will be found in every respect consistent with the welfare both of church and state. We are bound to receive the Bible as the only rule of the Christian religion, and the Great Author of the Bible as the only legislator in matters of religious faith and worship. We must, therefore, use every possible means to obtain a correct knowledge of the holy Scriptures; and then govern our profession and practice by the same unerring standard—most cheerfully allowing all other persons the same liberty.

On this great doctrine, the reader will no doubt be gratified with the sentiments of a justly celebrated writer. “By the religion of protestants” says the famous Chillingworth, “I do not understand the doctrine of Luther, or Calvin, or Melancthon; nor the confession of Augsburg or Geneva, nor the catechism of Heidelberg, nor the articles of the church of England, no, nor the harmony of protestant confessions: but that wherein they all agree, and which they all subscribe with a greater harmony, as a perfect rule of faith and actions; that is, the BIBLE. The BIBLE, I say, the BIBLE ONLY is the religion of protestants! Whatsoever else they believe besides it, and the plain, irrefragable, indubitable consequences of it, well may they hold it as matter of opinion: but, as matter of faith and religion, neither can they with coherence to their own grounds believe it themselves, nor require the belief of it of others, without most high and most *schismatical presumption*. I, for my part, after a long, and, as I verily believe and hope, impartial search of the true way to eternal happiness, do profess plainly, that I cannot find any rest for the sole of my foot, but upon this rock only. I will take no man's

judgment from him ; neither shall any man take mine from me. I think no man the worse man, nor the worse Christian, and I will love no man the less, for differing in opinion from me. And what measure I mete to others, I expect from them again.”*

This is the grand fundamental principle of all true religion, the great importance of which seems to have been acknowledged by all discerning protestants, and was recognised and acted upon in the great separation from the church of Rome. Its enemies, as well as its friends, appear to have been thoroughly aware of its very great importance. The attempts which were made by the occasional conformity and schism bills to lessen its salutary influence, or to defeat its operation, too plainly discover their dread of its irresistible power.

One of the first laws passed in this reign for the extension of religious emancipation, was in behalf of the quakers. Their affirmation was already accepted in civil causes instead of their oath. This was conceived to be an untried and hazardous experiment in legislation ; so that this indulgence, when granted in the reign of king William, was limited to a certain term of years, that opportunity might be afforded to ascertain whether a nation could exist, where the solemn affirmation of sober men, who show so much conscience as to suffer for their religion, could be deemed equivalent to the oath of any lewd, drunken profligate, whose execrations and appeals to the Deity accompany almost every sentence he utters, whether true or false. The result of this grave, national experiment was, that the quakers having passed honourably through their course of probation, obtained a renewal of the legislative indulgence, without any limitation of time ; so that it became a perpetual law of the realm, that the affirmation of a quaker should be admitted in civil suits at law as equivalent to an oath, and the breach of it be subject to all the penalties of perjury. An additional clause was incorporated by the lords, extending this indulgence to Scotland and the British colonies for five years. This melioration of the condition of friends proved “ very satisfactory to all the brethren ; for which they were truly thankful first to God, then to those in authority.”†

* Chillingworth's *Safe Way*, Chap. vi. sect. 56.

† *Extracts*, p. 1.

It must not, however, be supposed that the nation was, at this early period, so completely recovered from the derangement of "high church and Sacheverell," as to be perfectly sane in all its notions, and decent in all its deportment. Multitudes of persons considered it as a very hard case that they must not be allowed to persecute by law; therefore they determined to avenge themselves on the defeated party, by setting the law at defiance, in order to enjoy the luxury of worrying those whom they hated. With the revival of the old cry, "the church is in danger," they introduced the additional remark, that if the good old church of England was to be destroyed, it mattered not much whether by a Lutheran king George, or by a catholic James the third. But the expiring tiger was too weak to rouse the nation by his dying roar. The seditious pamphlets which were industriously circulated, though not deficient in venom, wanted point to sting; but they were sufficiently mischievous to have thrown the nation into universal confusion, had not the just energies of the government interposed, and the blessing of heaven prevented them.

At Oxford, they succeeded in blowing into a flame the malice and bigotry of the populace. On the evening of the 29th of May, 1715, a great mob of scholars, and other inhabitants of Oxford, rose and gutted, as they called it, the presbyterian place of worship, breaking all the windows, and carrying away the doors, benches, and wainscot, with which they made a bonfire! "Having heard of their intention," says the quaker's narrative, "to use our meeting-house as they had done that of the presbyterians, an advertisement thereof was drawn up, directed to the mayor, and sent by a friend: the mayor was not at home, but his servant promised to deliver it to him. We obtained no benefit by our application to the magistrate for protection. Hearing a great noise at a distance about nine in the evening, we had soon an account that they were using our meeting-house as they had done that of the presbyterians the night before. They broke in by violence, and took away all the forms and seats that were loose, and taking off the doors from their hinges they burned them in their bonfire. They broke into the dwelling-house of our ancient friend Thomas Nichol's daughter, who was a widow, making great

destruction, and shedding some blood. From thence they went to the baptist meeting-house, and destroyed it in like manner.

“ We went next morning,” the narrative adds, “ to view the ruins of the meeting-house, and of our friend Nichol’s dwelling; and, as we were at the former, I stood upon a small eminence, and looking over the ruins, many scholars, and other people being there, I said pretty loudly, so that all might hear, can these be the effects of religion and learning? Some of the scholars seemed ashamed, and said it was the mob. But a spectator said, you yourselves were that mob, and you will be overtaken with just punishment.” A kindred spirit fomented and raised similar tumults at Birmingham, Bristol, Chippingham, Reading, Norwich, and some other towns, where the dissenters were insulted, and their places of worship burned to ashes.*

On the commencement of these outrages, the ministers of the three denominations in London presented an address to the king, openly protesting their unshaken attachment to his crown and government, expressing their grateful sentiments for that portion of religious freedom which they enjoyed, and declaring their utmost abhorrence of all attempts, at home or abroad, to favour the popish pretender. This is called “ a loyal and sensible address;”† upon the presentation of which his majesty returned this most gracious answer:—“ I am very much concerned at the *unchristian* and *barbarous* treatment, which those of your persuasion have met with, in several parts of the kingdom, and care shall be taken that a *full compensation* be made to them for their sufferings. I thank you for this address, and you may be assured of my protection.”‡

The two houses of parliament warmly espoused the cause of the sufferers, and a law was made for the punishment of these violations of Christianity and good order. It enacted “ that if any persons riotously and tumultuously assembled together, to the disturbance of the public peace, and did unlawfully and with force demolish or pull down, or begin to demolish or pull

* Gough, vol. iv. p. 165.—Bogue and Bennett, vol. iii. p. 122.

† Clarke, vol. iii. p. 87.

‡ Crosby, vol. iv. p. 129.

down, any church or chapel, or any building for religious worship certified and registered according to the 1 W. 18. (the act of toleration) the same shall be adjudged felony, without benefit of clergy; and the hundred, where such tumult is committed, shall answer for damages, as in cases of robbery.”*

The demolishing of places of worship, though sufficiently outrageous, was innocent sport, when compared with the grand measures of the party for the destruction of all liberty, civil and religious. A rebellion broke out in the north, which was, after a time, headed by the pretender himself: but this mad undertaking was attended with the fatuity which appeared to be entailed on the counsels of the Stuarts; therefore the rebels were soon crushed, and many both of the leaders and tools of the party paid the awful forfeiture of their lives. Among these was a clergyman of the name of William Paul, who being tried and condemned as a traitor, was drawn to the place of execution in his canonical habits, which so raised the compassion of those who had no mercy on meeting-houses, that many of them sighed, and wept bitterly, and some snatched kisses from him as he passed by. When he was removed from the sledge, on which he was conveyed to Tyburn, and put into a cart, he began to read his speech to the people, which was of so inflammatory a tendency, that the sheriff forbade him to proceed. In this speech, he openly declared the unlawfulness of the revolution, and protested his allegiance to the pretender, pronouncing the church of England “the schismatical church,” for having conformed to the changes effected by king William! He was then hanged, drawn, and quartered, for high treason against his majesty king George.

Oxford being considered as the nursery of those clergy, who raised the senseless cry of church and king, that university was strictly watched, and treated with some degree of severity. Major-general Pepper, with a strong detachment of dragoons, took possession of the city early one morning, declaring that he would instantly shoot any of the students, who should appear out of the bounds of their own colleges. Several scholars having discovered, when wine had thrown them off their guard, the bent of their inclinations, by uttering their

* Burn, vol. ii. p. 179.

good wishes for the pretender, and drinking his health, it was reported to the government. The vice-chancellor, heads of houses, and proctors of the university, therefore, aware of the unfavourable reflections to which they were exposed, published a declaration of their abhorrence of seditious practices, and their determination to punish all offenders to the utmost rigour of their statutes. This did not give satisfaction to the government, which, not trusting the Oxonian fidelity, sent down a messenger to apprehend the seditious students, and bring them up to London. Two of them were, accordingly, tried in the court of king's bench, and being found guilty, were sentenced to walk through the courts of Westminster, with a specification of their crime affixed to their foreheads, to pay a fine of five nobles each, to be imprisoned two years, and to find security for their good behaviour for seven years after their release.

The administration acted an impolitic part in seizing this opportunity to vent its hatred against the whole body to which the offenders belonged. Oxford, which had so often blown the trumpet of alarm and danger, and summoned the hosts of bigotry to the common outcry against the friends of liberty, had now an opportunity of tasting the bitterness of popular odium. The charge of Jacobitism was so justly alleged against them, that when the university presented his majesty with their address of congratulation on the re-establishment of peace, it was rejected with disdain, as the disgusting pretence of hypocritical disloyalty; and the Oxford decree, which passed in the days of the Stuarts, pronouncing the doctrine of resistance to tyranny, a damnable doctrine, was, by order of parliament, burnt by the hands of the common hangman.*

Whatever may be said of the impolicy of provoking men of erroneous principles, and of the injustice of making a whole body accountable for the faults of individual members, it is certainly consoling to see the enemies of man's dearest interests deprived of the power of doing mischief. If there be times when governments cannot make all their subjects easy, who would not wish that the heavy arm of power should be laid on those who oppose their neighbour's welfare, whose prin-

* Bogue and Bennett, vol. iii. p. 125, from Tindal.

ciples would admit others to share with them in all their privileges? High churchmen having thus rendered themselves obnoxious to the government, had the mortification of seeing the former victims of their intolerance bask in the sunshine of royal favour.

Oxford having sunk under the weight of monkish bigotry, her sister Cambridge, which had frequently distinguished herself by the liberality which accompany science and religion, proportionably rose in favour, and, taking prudent care to cultivate the good opinion of the court, received some peculiar tokens of kindness. The king purchased, at the price of six thousand pounds, the library of bishop Moore, containing about thirty thousand valuable books, and presented them to the favoured university, where they now form the best part of the public library.

The progress of religious liberty was in another direction still more interesting. The test act, the occasional conformity act, and the schism bill, which had odiously oppressed the friends of liberty, began now to attract the attention of the government. The leading persons who had promoted two of these statutes, were impeached and imprisoned for high treason; and they are said to have been "some of the worst works of the worst men that ever influenced the affairs of Great Britain."*

Certain leading parliament-men having taken into private consideration the breach of court promises to the dissenters, agreed to meet together in order to discuss the propriety of seeking the repeal of these intolerant laws. Their number increased so rapidly, that, in a short time, upwards of two hundred members of the house of commons assembled at a tavern, to consult whether a bill should be brought into parliament to repeal the act against occasional conformity. Lord Molesworth, Sir Richard Steele, and others, addressed the meeting, to prove the justice and propriety of relieving the dissenters from those odious disabilities, which had been imposed upon them in the late reign. They urged the expediency of putting these hearty friends of the king into a capacity to serve him and their country without restriction, and they had reason to believe such

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 671.

a bill would be very acceptable to his majesty. The majority of the assembly were of this opinion, but Mr. Tufnel, who had consulted a person in high office, and found that the court was apprehensive of serious opposition in the house of peers, advised the assembly to defer the measure rather than risk a defeat. He said, "I have already so often declared against the occasional act, that I hope nobody will suspect me of entertaining any doubt of the propriety of its repeal. For, besides the reasonableness and justice of the measure, gratitude demands that we should take off a mark of infamy, which the enemies of the protestant succession have put upon the best friends of the present reigning family. But the question is, whether we ought not to defer our application to a more favourable opportunity." At a subsequent meeting, an intimation was received from one of the ministers of state, that most of the obstacles to the passing of such a bill were then removed, which encouraged them to proceed to introduce the business into parliament. It was signified that six or seven of the bishops acknowledged the injustice done the dissenters, and promised not to oppose the repeal; but the affair still experienced considerable delay.

These meetings at length occasioned angry reflections in the house of commons. Mr. Smith, in a speech full of reproaches on the errors of the ministry, said, "was it not an error to form parties and cabals in order to bring in a bill to repeal the act against occasional conformity?" To which Mr. Barrington Shute replied, that nothing in his opinion was either more just, or more reasonable, than the repeal of the act against dissenters, and he could not help wondering that a gentleman who had been turned out of his employment in the last reign, and restored since the king's coming to the crown, should account it a mistake to make his majesty's undoubted friends easy. Mr. Smith defended his inconsistencies on the ground of expediency, contending that though he was for allowing liberty of conscience to the dissenters, and had voted against the occasional bill; yet, now it was passed into a law, it could not, in his opinion, be repealed without disquieting all the people in the land.*

* *Histor. Regis. for 1714*, p. 164.

The king, in his address to the parliament, advocated the principles of Christian freedom, and pleaded the cause of his subjects dissenting from the church of England. "I could heartily wish," said he, "that, at a time when the enemies of our religion are by all manner of artifices endeavouring to undermine and weaken it, both at home and abroad, all those who are friends to our present happy establishment, might unanimously concur in some proper method for the greater strengthening the protestant interest, of which, as the church of England is unquestionably the main support and bulwark, so will she reap the principal benefit of every advantage accruing by the union, and mutual charity of all protestants. As none can recommend themselves more effectually to my favour than by a sincere zeal for the just rights of the crown and the liberties of the people; so I am determined to encourage all those who act agreeably to the constitution of these my kingdoms, and consequently to the principles on which my government is founded." The lords, without debate, voted an address of thanks, which was, as usual, a perfect echo of the speech, and indicated their willingness to accomplish the object which his majesty declared, in public and private, to lie so near his heart. When a similar address was moved in the commons, the high party made this senseless inquiry, whether the church was to come over to the dissenters, or the dissenters to the church? and then moved, that, instead of employing the king's general expression, they should say, "to concur in the most effectual methods for strengthening the protestant interest of these kingdoms, *as far as the laws now in force will permit.*" This was rejected, and the original address passed.*

The dissenters considered themselves entitled to relief, not merely from the occasional conformity and schism bills, but also from the corporation and test acts. They presumed, therefore, that as the king was heartily desirous of removing the odious distinction between churchmen and dissenters from society, a distinction ever fraught with mischief, it was proper to meet and prefer their claim. The public meetings which they called, through all parts of the kingdom, to take the subject into consideration, were generally of opinion, that they

* Tindal, vol. i. p. 100.

ought to seek the repeal of all the invidious acts, or else let all remain till a more favourable opportunity should occur. But they were informed, that the king having pressed the affair with his ministers to the utmost, was assured by the earl of Sunderland, that the measure was impracticable, and that to press the repeal of the test act, at that time, would ruin all. His majesty's liberality and good sense prompted him to use every effort in his power to obtain ease and freedom for his dissenting subjects.* He informed lord Barrington, that if there were any hopes of carrying the whole, he would not be against it; but if, as he was assured, there were no hopes, he believed the dissenters were too much his friends to insist upon a thing, which might be infinitely prejudicial to him, and, instead of doing them any service, would do them great injury. As it appeared to be the wish of the king, that they should obtain what relief they could, the dissenters dropped all mention of the test act, receiving assurances that it should be repealed at a future period, though that period has not yet arrived.

The house of lords having passed a bill for quieting and establishing corporations, by removing any disabilities which arose from not having abjured the solemn league and covenant, earl Stanhope rose and said, that in his opinion a thing of far greater importance, and well becoming the wisdom of that august assembly, remained to be done in order to settle the minds, and unite the hearts, of all the well-affected to the present happy government; and that, for this purpose, he would offer a bill to the house, entitled, "an act for strengthening the protestant interest in these kingdoms." The bill was then read, which contained a repeal of the law against occasional conformity and the growth of schism, and of certain clauses in the corporation and test acts. This worthy peer having moved for the second reading of the bill, endeavoured to convince the house of the equity and advantage of restoring all classes of society to their natural rights, and of rescuing them from the stigmatizing and oppressive laws, which had been enacted in turbulent times, and obtained by indirect methods; for no other reason than because they had showed their determined

* Clarke, vol. iii. p. 88.

adherence to the revolution and the protestant succession. His lordship added, " That this desirable union of all true protestants, as it would certainly strengthen the protestant interest, so would it be an advantage, not a prejudice, to the church of England by law established, which would still be the head of all protestant churches.*

Stanhope, in this noble and generous effort, was supported by the earls of Sunderland and Stamford, but opposed by lord Buckinghamshire and some others. It was alleged, in general, that if this bill passed, instead of strengthening, as its preamble pretended, it would certainly weaken the church of England, by investing others with those offices which she then exclusively enjoyed. The earl of Nottingham observed, that the church of England was certainly the happiest church in the world, since the greatest contradictions contributed to her support ; for nothing could be more contradictory than a bill to strengthen the protestant interest and the church of England, which, at the same time, repeals two acts that were made for her further security.

When the debate was resumed, the earl of Cholmondley said, that before they proceeded any further in an affair wherein the church was so intimately concerned, he thought it highly proper to have the opinion of the venerable prelates. This being unanimously approved, the archbishop of Canterbury rose, and declared against the bill. He said, he had all imaginable tenderness for well-meaning dissenters, but affirmed, that they had very little share in the merit of the revolution, and that they had abused the liberty which that event afforded them. He urged that the practice of occasional conformity was considered by the soberest dissenters as censurable ; and that though the law to prevent the growth of schism might carry a face of severity, it was needless to make an act to repeal it, since no advantage had ever been taken of it against the dissenters. Had his grace sat under the suspended sword of Dyonisius, while enjoying the good things which the see of Canterbury afforded, would he have thought it needless to remove the weapon, because it had never fallen upon his head, since it had been hung up *in terrorem* ?

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 671.

The archbishop of York followed on the same side ; but having made certain reflections on Dr. Hoadly, bishop of Bangor, he was answered by that prelate, who said he was so far from having altered his principles, as was insinuated, that both before and after he had been promoted to his present station in the church, he had endeavoured to bring over the dissenters ; though he was ever of opinion, that gentle means were the most effectual. He showed, at large, the unreasonableness and ill policy of imposing religious tests as a qualification for civil or military employments, which abridges men of their natural rights, deprives the state of the services of many of its best subjects, and exposes the most sacred institutions to be abused by profane and irreligious persons. He refuted the assertions that the occasional conformity and schism bills were not persecuting laws, and maintained, “if we admit that the principle of self-defence allows us to lay restraints on others in matters of religion, all the persecutions of the heathens, and even of the popish Inquisition, may be justified. As to the power, of which many clergymen seem to be so fond and zealous, I own that the desire of power and riches was natural to all men, but I have learned, both from reason and from the Gospel, that this desire should not be allowed to entrench upon the rights and liberties of their fellow-countrymen.”*

Dr. Hoadly's philanthropic sentiments received the sanction and support of the learned Dr. Kennet, bishop of Peterborough ; who declared that, without reflecting on his brethren for opposing this bill, he was assured the repeal of the odious acts would, far from injuring the church, redound to her advantage and security. The evidence of history proved, that the church was in the most safe and flourishing state, when the clergy, instead of affecting power which did not belong to them, were tender of the rights and liberties of their fellow-subjects ; but that arbitrary measures and persecutions first brought, as the experience of the last century sufficiently evinced, scandal and contempt upon the clergy, and, at last, ruin both upon church and state. “The church,” said Kennet, “is a term indeed of sacred and venerable import, when properly understood ; but in the mouths of bigots, or malicious and designing

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 672.

men, it has often produced the most fatal effects. The cry of 'the church is in danger,' has often made a mighty noise in the mouths of silly women and children, and been employed to carry on sinister designs. The dissenters, though the most zealous promoters of the revolution, have hitherto been no gainers by it; for they might have enjoyed toleration under king James, if they would have complied with his measures; while the establishment has gained all its present honours and emoluments. To exclude dissenters from serving that government of which they are the *firmest supporters*, is the grossest political absurdity.* Lord Lansdowne was the most violent opposer of the bill. His speech, full of stings, and replete with venom, proved, that only the power, not the disposition, to persecute was extinct.

It was at length agreed to leave out certain clauses concerning the corporation and the test acts, by which concession the bill passed the lords, and was sent down to the commons, where, after some debate, it was carried by a majority of two hundred and twenty-one against one hundred and seventy voices. It received the royal assent on the 18th of February, 1718; and in the royal speech, at the close of the session, his majesty expressed the highest satisfaction at this signal instance of legislative wisdom and moderation.†

This important conquest being obtained over intolerance, and in favour of Christian freedom, the parliament pursued its enlightened and liberal course, by passing another bill for the further extension of religious liberty. An act in the twelfth year of queen Anne contained a clause which breathed all the unchristian bigotry of that period, by declaring that no person should be capable of being guardian for the poor in the city of Bristol, who had not previously taken the sacrament according to the rites of the church of England! This clause, which excluded the dissenters of Bristol, a highly respectable and wealthy body, from all influence in managing the fund of the poor, to which they largely contributed, was brought into the two houses of parliament and was repealed. Deeply as this act was stained with barbarian prejudice and flagrant injustice, the bishop of Bristol was not ashamed to become its advocate, and

* Histor. Regis. for 1719.

† Belsham's George I., p. 184.

to use all his influence both to procure a petition against the repeal, and to induce several lords to join him in his opposition. The dissenters gained the victory, and left the bishop and his coadjutors to record their own disgrace in the form of a protest.*

It was at this time proved upon the clearest evidence, that, from the greatest good, serious evils may arise. Knowledge enables men to commit crimes which are impossible to the ignorant. Religious toleration was, in the year 1721, loudly accused of generating socinianism, heresy, and blasphemy! since many fugitive pieces were published against the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, and all their principal doctrines. One pamphlet, entitled, “A Sober Reply to Mr. Higgs’ merry Argument for the tritheistical Doctrine of the Trinity,” attracted peculiar attention; because it was said to have been written by an officer of his majesty’s household. The heretic was dismissed from his post; but the mistaken friends of orthodoxy still complained that little or nothing was done to punish him. The dean of Windsor brought a bill into parliament for the more effectual suppressing of blasphemy and profaneness. The preamble set forth, that many books had lately been published against the Christian religion, which the laws in existence were not sufficient to suppress. It was, therefore, to be enacted, that any person who should deny certain doctrines as set forth in the thirty-nine articles of the church of England; and every person who should, by advised speaking, deny these points, should, over and above the penalties of the statute of king William against blasphemy, be imprisoned for several months; unless he would renounce his error, and make an open profession of his faith in a certain prescribed form of words.† It was further to be decreed, that if any preacher, in any separate congregation, should by writing, or advised speaking, deny any fundamental articles of the Christian religion, he should be deprived of the benefit of the toleration act. The justices of the peace were to summon every such preacher, or any person called a quaker, to appear before them to subscribe the declaration of his belief according to the form contained in the act, or be denied the benefit of toleration.

**Histor. Regis.* for 1718.

† *Hist. of Stuarts*, vol. iii. p. 718.

The archbishop of Canterbury having moved that this bill should be committed, lord Onslow declared that he was as much against blasphemy as any man ; but he would not vote for a law which enacted persecution, as this bill did ; therefore he moved that it should be thrown out. The duke of Wharton rose, and said, “ I am not insensible of the common talk concerning me ; therefore I am glad of this opportunity to justify myself, by declaring that I am far from being a patron of blasphemy, or an enemy to religion. I will not, however, vote for this bill, which I believe repugnant to Scripture.” Then, pulling an old family Bible out of his pocket, he read several passages, and, as a comment upon them, moved that the bill be rejected. The earl of Peterborough declared, that though he was for a parliamentary king, he did not wish to have a parliamentary God or religion ; and if the house were for such a one, he would go to Rome, and endeavour to be chosen cardinal ; for he would rather sit with the conclave, than with their lordships on these terms. The bishop of Peterborough, declared that he would never be the executioner of such a law, which seemed to lead to the setting up of an Inquisition. But the bishops of London, Winchester, and Lichfield, with several of the temporal lords, voted for this iniquitous measure. One of the peers said, that he believed the calamity of the South Sea project, which then blasted the credit, and destroyed the peace of the country, was a judgment of God upon the blasphemy and profaneness of the nation. To which lord Onslow replied, “ that certainly the peer, who made this remark, must have been a great sinner ; for, it is said, he has been a great sufferer by the South Sea scheme.” The bill was thrown out by a great majority.

The spirit of the high church party, and the moderation, good sense, and independence of their opponents, were strikingly exemplified on the introduction and rejection of this bill, whose persecuting clauses tended “ to the establishment of a protestant Inquisition.”*

A cordial attachment to the great doctrines, which this bill was intended to guard, as well as love for truth in general, and a holy jealousy for the rights of private judgment, should in-

* Clarke, vol. iii. p. 91.

duce every one to rejoice in the failure of this erroneous project. The being of a God, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Trinity, and the divine inspiration of the sacred Scriptures, needed not an act of parliament to enforce belief on mankind. The provisions of the act were as iniquitous, as the whole design was useless. To oblige men by a parliamentary statute to believe certain doctrines, as they are set forth in the articles of the church of England; wherein was this less papistical and inquisitorial than to compel them to believe the decrees of the council of Trent? To condemn to imprisonment for asserting our sentiments in common conversation; to summon preachers to give an account of their theology to a country justice, who has perhaps no more religion or learning than is contained in his mittimus; to oblige millions of persons to subscribe to the words which a few scores of politicians had dictated on the most abstruse questions in divinity, was a compound of folly and iniquity which it would be difficult to brand with a name sufficiently opprobrious.

The liberality of the government, not of the times, was further displayed in an extension of the freedom secured to the quakers. One of the friends had written a letter to the king, and a petition was presented to the legislature, to alter the form of their affirmation; because some of their members considered the words, "in the presence of Almighty God," equivalent to an oath; and so it proved to them the occasion of great sufferings. Thomas Story, being introduced to the secretary of state, said, that the favour which the government intended to the quakers, in perpetuating the affirmation act, as it then stood, was rendered nugatory to many of their friends, who could not conscientiously avail themselves of it; because they thought the words of the act contrary to the law of Jesus Christ. He then produced the form, and afterwards read that to which their annual meeting had agreed. The earl of Sunderland said to him, "you might have had the latter as soon as the former, if you had applied for it; for what we did was to serve you in your own way, and we thought we had fully satisfied you."

The king and the ministry being favourable to the design, a bill was brought into the house of commons to grant relief to the quakers, by altering their affirmation into these words, "I

solemnly, sincerely, and truly affirm and declare." It passed the lower house without difficulty, but encountered very violent opposition in the lords. Bishop Atterbury said, "I do not know why such indulgence should be given to a people who are hardly Christians." To this one of the temporal lords replied, "I wonder that the reverend prelate should doubt whether the quakers are Christians or not, since they are so, at least, by act of parliament; being included in the toleration act, under the general name of protestant dissenters." At this the bishop took fire, thinking it was a sneer at the church of England, which was created by act of parliament. When the lords were about going into a committee on the bill, they were unexpectedly presented by the archbishop of York, with a petition from certain persons who called themselves "the clergy in and about London." This petition stated that the bill might much affect the property of the subject, and the legal maintenance of the clergy by tithes; "because the people called quakers, pretend to deny the payment of tithes upon conscience; and therefore may be under a strong inducement to ease their consciences in one way, by violating them in another." The reverend petitioners inform the legislature, that government cannot be administered without oaths; and then adds: "But that which chiefly moves your petitioners to apply to your lordships, is, their serious concern lest the minds of good men should be grieved and wounded, and the enemies of Christianity triumph, when they shall see such condescensions made by a Christian legislature, to a set of men who renounce the divine institution of Christ, particularly that by which the faithful are initiated into his religion, and denominated Christians, and who cannot, on this account, be deemed worthy of that sacred name." They also expressed their Christian solicitude, lest multitudes should turn quakers, in order to screen themselves from oaths.* Did these sage divines then expect the peers to believe, that they, who showed so much selfishness in preferring the security of their tithes to the peace of men's consciences, and so much malevolence in branding the quakers as Pagans, were so full of benevolence, as to be chiefly moved with a fear lest the minds of good men should be grieved

* Gough, vol. iv. p. 189.

with their concessions to tender consciences? The two archbishops and several of the bishops warmly supported the petition; but other prelates opposed it, and it was at last branded and rejected as a libel.*

One of the quakers having an interview with the duke of Somerset, informed him that he understood the two universities intended to imitate the London clergy in petitioning against the bill. The duke replied, "perhaps Oxford may attempt it, being influenced by the archbishop of York, and the bishops of Rochester and Chester; but if they should, they are obnoxious. As to Cambridge, they have done nothing. A set of fellows calling themselves the clergy in and about London, have sent a petition, in which they pretend to blame both houses of parliament for encouraging a sect which they rank with Jews, Turks, and Infidels: as if we were to be imposed upon by them, and knew not what to do without their directions. Besides, we do not know who they are; for out of five hundred of the London clergy, we find only forty-one names, and these very obscure." It was certainly no small honour to the London clergy that few of them chose to affix their names to so obnoxious a document.

When the bill was in the committee, the archbishop of Canterbury moved that the quakers' affirmation might not be admitted in courts of judicature, but only among themselves; which they certainly could have done for themselves, without applying to the parliament. The archbishop of York proposed that their affirmation should not be admitted in any suit for tithes, the very cause in which they most needed legislative relief. But the two venerable archbishops were outvoted, and the bill passed and obtained the royal assent.†

In all these legislative proceedings, the government discovered its honourable and tolerant spirit; and, notwithstanding the violent opposition of men of high principles, and their dominant propensity to encourage the persecution of their fellow-christians, all these legal securities reflect great praise on the illustrious house of Hanover, and transmit the reputation of its character unimpeachable to posterity. The prince on the throne and those about him continued unshaken in maintaining

* Gough, vol. iv. p. 190.

† Ibid. p. 187, 190.

and securing the blessings of toleration, checking and suppressing all attempts to make inroads upon it. In all the measures that were adopted, they discovered their good sense, and Christian moderation; and, as their proceedings were particularly calculated to promote the ease and happiness of the people, the unity and strength of the nation, the peace and prosperity of the churches of Christ; so they were the honourable means of generating an improved tone of feeling, and of diffusing genuine Christian liberality among all ranks of society.

SECTION II.

Religious Controversy the means of diffusing Liberal Principles.

THE discussion of theological subjects is happily calculated to discriminate between truth and error; and to exhibit both in their true character; the one to the approbation, the other to the disapprobation of mankind. We ought to submit every opinion in religion and morals to the closest investigation, and yield to the conviction of truth, as derived from irrefragable evidence. When our views of the Gospel have passed this impartial test, they cannot fail to afford us unspeakable satisfaction, to form a secure basis for our faith, and to inspire our minds with renewed courage in our Christian progress; while, at the same time, we shall feel a corresponding propensity, and discover an equal degree of zeal, to diffuse light and truth in every direction. The propagation of liberal principles and Christian tolerance is not the least benefit to be derived from theological discussion; especially when our sole object is the search of truth, to the exclusion of worldly interest, and when we conduct our inquiries with strict impartiality and Christian moderation.

We have related, in the foregoing section, some of the disgraceful outrages committed against the friends of Christian freedom, and how they were honourably suppressed by the government. We have also briefly adverted to the shocking rebellion, which was intended to subvert English liberty; but that the diabolical project was blasted, and many of the rebels punished. On the restoration of national tranquillity, nume-

rous congratulatory addresses were presented to the king, among which was that from the dissenting ministers of the three denominations, declaring their strong abhorrence of the rebellion, their firm allegiance to his majesty, and their unshaken adherence to the constitution. To this loyal and affectionate address, his majesty returned this most gracious answer:—"I thank you for your dutiful and affectionate address. I am fully convinced of the loyalty and zeal of the protestant dissenters. I will give order for the speedy payment of the damages they have sustained in the late tumults; and you shall always have my protection."*

The liberal sentiments of the king greatly contributed to the good order of society, and to restrain that fanatical humour which was always ready to countenance and encourage ecclesiastical despotism. In this reign, a most important event occurred which exhibited the patrons of intolerance in their proper colours; while it was made subservient in promoting to a great extent, the cause of religious liberty. This circumstance was the famous Bangorian controversy, occasioned by a sermon preached before the king, by DR. HOADLY, lately promoted to the see of Bangor. The court preacher, unlike most of the candidates for that honour, had so distinguished himself in the last reign, by his rational views of ecclesiastical power, that as soon as the house of Hanover ascended the throne, he was rewarded with this preferment. He had already provoked an irritable, envenomed race, by his "Preservative against the Principles and Practices of the Non-jurors;" and now rendered himself doubly obnoxious to the party, by his sermon at the royal chapel, on "The Nature of the Kingdom of Christ." As the foundation of this memorable discourse, he selected the declaration of Jesus Christ: "MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD." His direct and undisguised object was to prove that the kingdom of Christ, and the sanctions by which it is supported, were wholly intellectual and spiritual: that the *church*, taking the term in its utmost latitude, did not, and could not, possess the slightest degree of *authority* under any commission, or pretended commission, derived from Christ: that the church of England, and all other national churches, were

* Crosby, vol. iv. p. 177.

merely civil or human institutions, established for the purpose of diffusing and perpetuating Christianity. He openly asserted Christ's supreme authority in his church, and as explicitly denied that he had delegated his power to any man or body of men whatever, as the bulk of the clergy pretended. This was cutting up clerical dominion by the roots; and, since the bishop maintained the entire spirituality of a Christian church, that the ministers of the Gospel have nothing to do with secular concerns, and that the magistrate has no right to punish men for matters purely religious, it was no wonder that the choler of the clergy was raised. They easily perceived, that if Hoadly's notions respecting the kingdom of Christ prevailed, their own kingdom must fall, which excited in their breasts almost universal alarm. On this memorable occasion, the learned prelate addressed his audience in the following instructive language:

“As the church of Christ is the kingdom of Christ, he is King; and this implies, that he is the sole Lawgiver to his subjects, and himself the sole Judge of their behaviour, in the affairs of conscience and eternal salvation. In this sense, therefore, his kingdom is not of this world; that he hath, in those points, left behind him no visible, human authority; no vicegerents, who can be said properly to supply his place; no interpreters, upon whom his subjects are absolutely to depend; no judges over the consciences or religion of his people. If any such absolute vicegerent authority, either for making new laws, or interpreting old ones, or judging his subjects, in religious matters, were lodged in any men upon earth; the consequence would be, that what still retains the name of the church of Christ, would not be the kingdom of Christ, but the kingdom of those men who were vested with such authority. Whoever hath such an authority of making laws is so far a king; and whoever can add new laws to those of Christ equally obligatory, is truly a king as Christ himself is: nay, whoever hath an absolute authority to interpret any laws, he is truly the Lawgiver, to all intents and purposes; and not the person who first wrote or spoke them. So, whenever persons erect tribunals, and exercise judgment over the consciences of men, and assume to themselves the determination of such points, as can be determined only by One who knows the

hearts; or when they make any of their own declarations or decisions to concern and affect the state of Christ's subjects; this is so far the taking of Christ's kingdom out of His hands, and placing it in their own.

“Nor is this matter at all made better by declaring themselves to be vicegerents, or law-makers, or judges, *under* Christ, in order to carry on the ends of his kingdom. If men have the power of so interpreting, or adding laws, or judging men, that Christians shall be indispensably and absolutely obliged to obey those laws, and to submit to those decisions; then the kingdom in which they rule, is not the kingdom of Christ, but of *themselves*: He doth not rule in it, but *they*. Whether they happen to agree with him, or differ from him, as long as they are lawgivers and judges, without any interposition from Christ to guide their decisions, they are kings of this kingdom, and not Jesus Christ.

“If, therefore, the church of Christ be the kingdom of Christ, it is essential to it, that Christ be the sole lawgiver, and sole judge of his subjects, in all points relating to the favour or displeasure of Almighty God; and that all his subjects, in what station soever they may be, are equally subjects to Him; and that no one of them, any more than another, hath authority either to make new laws for Christ's subjects, or to impose a sense upon the old ones, or to judge, censure, or punish the servants of another master, in matters relating purely to conscience or salvation. If any person hath any other notion, either through a long use of words, or a negligence of thought, let him only ask, whether the church of Christ be the kingdom of Christ? If it be, whether this notion of it do not absolutely exclude all other legislators and judges, in matters of conscience; and whether it can be his kingdom, if any mortal have such power of legislation and judgment in it? This inquiry will bring us back to the first and only true account of the church or kingdom of Christ, in the mouth of a Christian.

“The laws of this kingdom, as Christ left them, have nothing of this world in their view; no tendency, either to the exaltation of some in worldly pomp and dignity, or to their dominion over the faith and religious conduct of others of his subjects, or to the erection of any sort of temporal kingdom, under the covert and name of a spiritual one.

“ The sanctions of Christ’s law are rewards and punishments. But of what sort ? Not the rewards of this world ; not the offices or glories of this state ; not the pains of prisons, banishments, fines, or any *lesser* or *more moderate* penalties : nay, not the much lesser, *negative discouragements* that belong to human society. Jesus Christ was far from thinking that *these* could be the instruments of that persuasion which he thought acceptable to God. As the great end of his kingdom was to guide men to happiness, after the short image of it here below ; so he took his motives from that place where his kingdom first began, and where it was at last to end ; from those rewards and punishments in a future state, which had no relation to this world : and, to show that his kingdom was not of this world, all the sanctions which he thought fit to give to his laws, were not at all of this world.

“ St. Paul understood this subject so well, that he gives an account of his own conduct, and that of others in the same station, in these words : ‘ Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men : ’ whereas, in too many Christian countries, since his days, if some who profess to succeed him, were to give an account of their own conduct, it must be in a quite contrary strain : ‘ Knowing the terrors of *this world*, and having them in our *power*, we do not *persuade* men, but *force* their outward profession against their inward persuasion.’

“ Wherever this is practised, whether in a great or small degree, in that place there is so far a change, from a kingdom which is not of this world, to a kingdom which is of this world. As soon as you hear of any of the engines of this world, whether of the greater or the lesser sort, you must immediately conclude that then, and so far, the kingdom of this world takes place. If the very essence of God’s worship be *spirit* and *truth* ; if religion be virtue and charity, under the belief of the supreme Governor and Judge ; if real faith cannot be the effect of *force* ; and if there can be no reward where there is no *willing choice* : then, in all, or any of these cases, to apply force or flattery, worldly pleasure or pain, is to act contrary to the interests of true religion ; since it is plainly opposite to the maxims upon which Christ founded his kingdom, who chose the motives which are not of this world, to support a kingdom which is not of this world. It is too visible to be hid, that

wherever the rewards and punishments are changed, from future to present, from the world to come, to this world ; there the nature of the kingdom founded by our Saviour is so far changed, that it is become, in such degree, what he professed his kingdom was not ; and is of the same sort with other common earthly kingdoms, in which the rewards are worldly honours, posts, offices, pomp, dominion, and the punishments are prisons, fines, banishments, gallies, racks, or something less of the same sort.

“ When, therefore, you see our Lord, in his methods, so far removed from those adopted by many of his disciples ; when you read nothing, in the doctrine of his kingdom, of taking the concerns of this world, and mixing them with those of eternity ; no commands which by frowns and discouragements could attend upon conscience and religion ; no rules against the inquiry of all his subjects into his original message from heaven ; no orders for the kind and charitable force of penalties or punishments to make men think and choose aright ; no calling upon the secular arm, whenever the magistrate should become Christian, to enforce his doctrines, or to back his spiritual authority ; but, on the contrary, as plain a declaration as a few words can make, that his kingdom is not of this world : —I say, when you see this from the whole tenor of the Gospel, so vastly opposite to many who take his name into their mouths, the question with you ought to be, whether he did not know the nature of his own kingdom, or church, better than any since his time ? whether you can suppose, he left any such matters to be decided against himself, and his own express professions ? and whether if an angel from heaven should give any account of his kingdom, contrary to what he hath done, it can be of any weight or authority with Christians ?

“ To set up any other authority in the kingdom of Christ, to which his subjects are indispensably and absolutely obliged to submit their consciences, or their conduct, evidently destroys the rule and authority of Jesus Christ as king. There are some professed Christians, who contend openly for such an authority, as indispensably obliges all around them to unity of profession, even in what they do not, what they cannot believe to be true. Others, who think they act a glorious part in opposing such an enormity, are very willing, for their own sakes, to

retain such an authority as shall oblige men to forbear the profession and publication of what they do believe, be it in their estimation of ever so great importance.

“ Both these pretensions are founded on a mistaken notion of the *peace*, as well as *authority*, of the church of Christ. Which of them is the most insupportable to a honest and Christian mind, I am not able to say : because they both found the authority of the church of Christ, upon the ruins of sincerity and common honesty, and mistake stupidity and sleep for peace ; because they would both equally have prevented *all Reformation* where it has been, and will for ever prevent it where it is not ; and, in a word, because both equally devest Jesus Christ of his empire in his own kingdom ; set the obedience of his subjects loose from Himself ; and teach them to prostitute their consciences at the feet of those, who have no right thus to trample upon them.

“ The *peace* of Christ’s kingdom is a manly and reasonable peace ; built upon charity, love, and mutual forbearance, receiving one another as God receives us. As for any other peace, founded upon a submission of our honesty, as well as our understandings, it is falsely so called. It is not the peace of the kingdom of Christ, but the lethargy of it ; and a sleep unto death, when his subjects shall throw off their relation to him ; fix their subjection to others ; and even in cases where they have a right to see, and where they think they see his will, shall shut their eyes and go blindfold at the command of others : because those others are not pleased with their inquiries into the will of their great Lord and Judge.”

The learned and venerable prelate delivered his sentiments on this important occasion without equivocation or reserve ; and, in his “ Rights of Subjects,” he thus defended the cause of perfect religious liberty :

“ If leaving every man freely, and without restraint, to make the best use of his Bible, be an unspeakable unhappiness, for God’s sake why was the world disturbed with any reformation at all, which would indeed have been only a dream or image of a reformation, without claiming this universal right of all Christians equally ? If this be such a terrible consequence as to justify human restraints, why was the popish restraint disturbed which would have prevented this mischief more ef-

fectually, if restraints could do it? Shall we still go on to mock mankind, and tell them that a popish restraint is indeed bad, but that a protestant restraint is very good and useful; that Christians have a right against all restraints, except those which we ourselves lay upon them; that the papists cannot judge who of the laity are capable of using the Scriptures, and who not, but that we can? It is time to leave off such partiality to ourselves, and such insults upon our brethren, lest the meanest and most ignorant of them should, by degrees, see that we speak as if popish restraints had been removed, for our own sakes only, and not for theirs. We cannot justify the taking away or restraining a right by human laws, which belongs to men by a divine law as to creatures capable of religion; under which consideration no human laws can have a proper authority over them. We may with more justice and equity, restrain men from making the best use of their eye-sight, or of their common prudence in their worldly affairs, than from making the best use of that law which God has proposed to all who hear it.

“ At the time of the reformation, the Christian world was sunk universally, clergy as well as laity, into a state of consummate ignorance and stupidity, not only as to literature, but as to true Christianity. I beg it may be inquired by what methods this miserable state of things was brought to such a pitch; and then by what methods it was in so *great a measure* cured by the reformation? The answer in one word is this, that the cause which was seen naturally to effect those evils was solely their taking away this right of judging from Christians, this supremacy with which Christ invested every Christian in his own behalf; and lodging this supremacy in one man, or in a council of men over others: this made all inquiries useless and dangerous. Terrors and restraints were added, and neither clergy nor laity were allowed to make the best use of their Bible. Hence was necessarily introduced the neglect of so ruinous a thing as study and consideration; and hence, by degrees, an inundation of ignorance and stupidity.

“ When this evil was not only seen but felt to be intolerable, how was it cured? Not by preaching up the right of some to judge for others in religion—not by pronouncing the necessity of restraints in the use of the Scriptures—not by destroy-

ing the supremacy invested in every Christian in his own behalf; but by calling upon *all equally* to search the Scriptures, and by teaching the people to make choice of their church communion, which they had a right to determine for themselves; also that Christ had called them to this true Christian liberty, and had vested in every one of his followers this supremacy, which resulted from their right to follow their own consciences in religion, which it was their duty to exercise. It was this, and this alone, which let the beams of divine light into that infernal prison of darkness and stupidity, which had so long enfeebled the eyes and enslaved the hearts of mankind. It was this which revived Christianity as it were from the dead, by sending all to the original fountain; and it was this alone which planted and increased true knowledge and freedom, instead of the blackness of darkness and the chains of slavery. If any methods have since been made use of contrary to these maxims, and inconsistent with these foundations, any restraints laid upon this Christian liberty, any discouragements to the universal freedom of Christians, I am sorry for it. There is just so much given back to the cause of ignorance and all its consequences, which must of necessity gain life and recover strength just in proportion to the discouragement of universal inquiry, and the private judgment of Christians to determine their own conduct in religion.

“There is no medium in this case. Either this supremacy must be lodged in every private Christian in his own behalf, or it must be lodged in some Christians for and over others. Christian liberty must either be entrusted with Christians for themselves, so that they must themselves bear their own burden, and answer to God for the use of what he has given them; or else it must be lodged in the hands of superiors, to dispense, curtail, or enlarge, just as their measure of light and judgment, and too often as their interest or inclination, humour or passion, form their resolutions. Either Christians have this right, every man in himself, by the principles of reason and the nature of true religion; or, they have it not. If they have it, it differs in this from their civil rights, that *they cannot rightfully give up the exercise of it*. In civil affairs they can give up the exercise of their rights by choosing another to judge and determine finally their civil controversies

between man and man; but it is not in their power to give up their religious rights, because they result from the nature of true religion, which requires individual will and choice: no one can give up these rights without destroying the foundation of all that can be called religion in man.

“ But, if every private Christian has not this right in himself, by what methods came superiors to have it? They could not become possessed of it by concession from their inferiors, because inferiors are supposed never to have possessed any such right to give to others; and as to any express declaration of the will of God in this case, the hardest protestant has never yet declared *uniformly* and in *express words*, for a divine right (a right indeed requiring the infallibility and authority of God) lodged in any superiors to judge in religion both for themselves and others, so as to preclude others from being finally determined by their own inward persuasions.

“ Whoever declares this, whether he know it or not, declares himself to be no protestant; and those who think to halve this right with their inferiors, by taking it away in part, and leaving it in part, only deceive themselves with vain words. It is in the nature of things, an indivisible point which no human art can possibly make otherwise, and experience has shown, and will ever show, that it must either be left whole, or taken away whole: there is no middle way between these. I am sorry that I have had occasion to say so much; but I sincerely think it my duty to take every occasion to remind Christians of that which alone makes them truly Christians, to engage them to love and value their own privileges, and not to be jested or frightened out of that supremacy with which God has invested every man in his own behalf, and which is so far from leading to the destruction of Christianity, or to promote consummate ignorance and stupidity, that I will presume to affirm, that true Christianity cannot be supposed to exist without it; and I am sure experience declares, that neither literature nor religious knowledge ever flourished or even the shadows of them remained after this was once discarded. The nation, I hope, never was so weak and so regardless of the Gospel, as to receive the *ecclesiastical constitution of this realm as the religion delivered by Christ*. All true consistent protestants receive the *New Testament only* as containing his re-

ligion. This is the religion of Christians considered as such ; this alone is their refuge, and the only avowed standard of all their notions amidst their different contradictory systems.

“ Another thing to be considered by Christians is, that the religion delivered by Christ can, with justice, be supported only by Christ’s methods. All the laws and acts of parliament in the world can only support an outward profession of something, which, so far as it is received from men, and is practised as the will of men, is so far different from the religion of Christ. They may keep up a human constitution, and either allure men by temporal rewards to adhere to the outward form of it, or terrify them by temporal inconveniences from departing from it, or indispose them from examining at all what it is, since it is more for their ease and their interest to take it as it is offered them. But the religion delivered by Christ, as such, is not concerned in such laws. It subsisted, the sincere profession of it subsisted, not only without, but often against human laws ; which is a demonstration that whatever such laws may preserve, it is not the religion delivered by Christ, nor ought the people to be so far imposed upon as to be made to believe this.

“ I know better what a true affection to the church of England in its present condition imports, than to suppose it came down immediately from heaven, pure and blameless, without spot or wrinkle ; and, I hope, I know better my duty to God and to Christ, than to prostitute the honour of the Gospel to that of any human constitution in the world. I shall leave to others the glory of representing the ecclesiastical constitution of this realm and the religion delivered by Christ as synonymous terms, and content myself with the reproach of considering his religion to be something very different from all human constitutions ; something to which all Christians ought equally to appeal, and by which to be determined, amidst all the various schemes and systems ; something of quite another nature than any thing that can be supported by the acts, and statutes, and laws framed in the different nations of this world ; and something which is best and most effectually preserved according to the will of Christ, by methods agreeable to the spirit of the Gospel.”*

* Hoadly’s Rights of Subjects, p. 95—172.

These are the catholic and incontrovertible sentiments of the learned prelate. The remarkable phenomenon of an English bishop defending the rights and liberties of the church of God, was reserved for the days of George the First; but its effects and benefits will be transmitted to the end of the world. The convocation having assembled, the principles of the learned prelate were attacked with more fury than could have been supposed to dwell in the breasts of reverend protestant divines. The lower house appointed a committee of six doctors, to draw up a representation against Hoadly's doctrines, to be laid before the archbishops and bishops. This representation being read for the approbation of the lower house, it was unanimously passed, accusing the bishop of having, in his obnoxious publications, asserted principles tending, first to the subversion of all government and discipline in the church of Christ, and to reduce his kingdom to a state of anarchy and confusion! and, secondly, to impugn and impeach the regal supremacy in causes ecclesiastical, and the authority of the legislature to enforce obedience in matters of religion by civil sanctions! To prove their charges against the bishop, they quoted several passages from his sermon.

When the lower house of convocation would have presented these accusations, they gravely asked their lordships, the bishops, "whether the pernicious tendency, which they ascribed to the writings of Dr. Hoadly, was not proved by these quotations, and whether, if his assertions were true, all acts of government in affairs of religion had not been invasions of Christ's authority, and usurpations upon his kingdom?" Who can wonder that the advocates of ecclesiastical tyranny should feel indignant at the honest opinions of the bishop, which were nothing less than public declarations, that all men had a just and equal claim to the liberty of forming Christian churches according to their own views of the Scriptures; and that the persecutions, with which such persons had been tormented for the imaginary crime of schism, were the grossest violations of truth, justice, and religion? But that such sentiments should be held by a bishop of an exclusive establishment, should be so honestly and boldly avowed, should be preached to a king, and received with decided approbation at a court, was such an illustrious triumph of religious truth and Christian freedom, as had not been witnessed in modern times.

The archbishop was sufficiently irritated by Hoadly's sentiments, and would no doubt have exercised ecclesiastical discipline upon this *false brother*, had the times been favourable, and had not the patriots of those days found it necessary to cherish these liberal and Christian principles, in order to oppose the rebellious spirit of those times, "fomented by the narrow, tyrannical system of high-church bigots, and adherents of the Stuart-race, on the presumption of a *divine right* of succession, and the infallibility of the doctrines of the church, among which they reckoned passive obedience and nonresistance."*

The bishop of Bangor, who had the solemn thanks of his country, for vindicating the principles of the revolution and protestant succession, together with the spiritual liberty and charity of the Christian church, rendered himself extremely obnoxious to the patrons of superstition, persecution, hereditary right, and arbitrary power. But while the convocation declared that the king ought to have been offended with the prelate's opinions, as subversive of the regal supremacy, his majesty was so enamoured by them, that he would not suffer the lower house to carry their accusation before the bishops, but sent a writ to the archbishop of Canterbury, commanding him to prorogue the convocation from the tenth of May, to the nineteenth of November. How equitable was it, that those who were so deeply in love with the ecclesiastical supremacy should feel it, at least, so far as to prevent them from worrying a bishop, for the simple fact of preaching and publishing those religious opinions which he believed to be agreeable to Scripture! which were so exactly conformable to the opinions and wishes of the king, so conducive to the happiness of mankind, and to the prosperity of the church of God!

From the year 1665, when the clergy in convocation gave up to the parliament the right of taxing their order, they were seldom allowed to do much business; but, since their envenomed violence against Dr. Hoadly, they have been suffered only to meet and disperse as a matter of form. The reverend gentlemen of the convocation, notwithstanding their avowal of the regal supremacy in ecclesiastical causes, felt themselves

* Archdeacon Blackburne's Works, vol. vi. p. 341.

exceedingly aggrieved by his majesty's employing it ; and they proved to the world, at least in this instance, that they approved of that supremacy so long only as it promoted their own power and interest. The supremacy having disarmed the convocation of all its power, occasioned deep and bitter murmurings among those who longed to rule and oppress the consciences of their brethren. They complained, that the convocation was become the butt of ridicule to all the nation, as an assembly which could not safely be trusted to do any thing ; but was called to meet and disperse like a regiment of soldiers on parade. They were tortured by the mortifying reflection that an assembly of presbyterians in Scotland, and even the quakers or any other dissenters in England, had their constant assemblies for the settlement of their own discipline ; while the church of England no sooner assembled her venerable prelates and divines, than they were again dispersed by the breath of authority. " Why is this," it was asked, " but because *they* are voluntary societies, not incorporated with the state, as we are ; whereby if we have gained some advantages, we have lost *greater* ?" But how few would resign the advantages of an incorporation with the state, to enjoy the " greater" privileges of voluntary societies !

To legislate for the consciences of men by the use of penal sanctions, which was the real object of ambition and worldly interest, was a kind of power which the patrons of liberty could not claim ; and happily for Britons, the parliament was so jealous of human rights and liberties as to take away this power from the convocation. The two houses now pass all laws relating to both church and state. This alteration has been equally destructive of clerical domination, and advantageous to liberty of conscience ; the latter of which has always felt some ill effects from such assemblies, convened to debate upon the best means of rearing ecclesiastical dignity upon the ruins of liberty and free inquiry.

By this seasonable interposition of the regal authority, and the abolition of the power and proceedings of the convocation, one formidable engine of persecution was, no doubt, for ever annihilated. The measure was perfectly legal, and all who believed his majesty's ecclesiastical supremacy ought to have been perfectly satisfied ; yet many of the dignitaries of the

church, with sufficient inconsistency and absurdity, have murmured and opposed the regal proceeding to this day. One of these dignitaries, belonging to a splendid cathedral, has lately declared and published his heroic hostility in these words :— “ I feel myself called on fearlessly and boldly to assert, that the order of council issued by George the First to compel the convocation to dissolve as soon as it was assembled, was an act of as great or greater tyranny than any one act of that arch-tyrant Henry the Eighth ! It was a decided breach of the English constitution, a destruction of the rights of the church, an infringement of the liberty of the subject, a subversion of Magna Charta, a contempt of the bill of rights, a violation of the Coronation Oath !!! ”* What a mercy is it, that the religion of Britons is not to be drilled and dragooned by such furious demagogues !

Bishop Hoadly, for defending the liberties of his country, displaying his love to mankind, exerting his endeavours to free religion from superstition and tyranny, which ambition and worldly interest had blended with it, and for restoring to religion that simplicity and usefulness which was the design of its Author ; for this his labour of love, he justly merited the warmest esteem of all good men, and not that infamy which the evil passions of designing persons uncharitably cast upon him. The doctrines contained in the bishop's sermon, said archdeacon Tenison, “ are true protestant doctrines, and so perfectly agreeable to the word of God, that there seems to me to be no just cause of complaint against him, which complaint would never have been thought of, had not some men, while they were making open professions of their loyal intentions, secretly designed to cast a blot and contempt upon the regal authority ; and under the plausible pretence of doing service to the church, laid hold of an opportunity of showing their personal hatred and resentment against the bishop.”†

The Bangorian controversy, besides proving a death-wound to the convocation, was, in many other respects, peculiarly favourable to the rights of conscience. Hoadly was so provokingly cool, that his enraged adversaries betrayed their defeat before the eyes of the world. The public eagerly gazed at this

* Dennis' Statement, p. 15.

† Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 651, 655.

battle among the higher ecclesiastics, and did not fail to profit by the instructive spectacle; for they discovered to their great consolation, that ecclesiastico political terrors, like what mariners call quaker guns in a merchant's vessel, need only to be closely viewed in order to be despised. The convocation seems to have been very little concerned for its own credit when it hazarded an attack on Hoadly's principles, which, like light, bring with them at once the evidence of their own worth, and their incalculable superiority to the opposite opinions.*

This controversy was carried on for several years with great ability and animation on the part of the bishop, aided by various excellent pens, though opposed by men whose learning and talents gave an artificial lustre to bigotry and absurdity. No controversy, upon the whole, ever more completely answered the purpose of diffusing liberal principles. The obscurity in which they had been long involved, was now dissipated. The public mind was enlightened and convinced. Clerical authority, a chimera vomiting flames, was destroyed; and the name of HOADLY will be transmitted from generation to generation, with additional honour, esteem, and grateful veneration. It would be doing the subject injustice to deny the king his share of praise for countenancing and supporting opinions diametrically opposite to those which have usually constituted a part of the policy of princes; and which reflect equal credit upon his understanding, integrity, and heart.

This venerable prelate, on another occasion, published his sentiments to the world in these words: "In all other societies, the express will of the founder, and the terms of fellowship and communion which he has laid down, are accounted sacred. In all other kingdoms, the will of the supreme power is law. No one pretends, or dares pretend, to make laws of equal force with his. How then is the fate of the Christian church, or of the church of Christ, when his will is declared insufficient, and the invented words and decisions of his subjects are made co-ordinate with his own, equally exclusive of others of his subjects from the communion of their fellow-subjects! How hard is the fate of those believers in him, who desire communion upon the terms God has prescribed, to be

* Bogue and Bennett, vol. iii. p. 140.

excluded by the words of men—by the inventions of men—imposed upon them for his precepts! And how unhappy is the church, to be reduced by such methods, within more narrow bounds than our Lord himself has confined it!*

The Bangorian controversy was not confined to the dignitaries and other members of the established church. The dissenters were drawn into it by Dr. Snape, who, writing against Hoadly, says—"awake ye Calamys, ye Pierces, ye Bradburys: what all in profound lethargy, when your own honour, and that of Calvin is thus at stake!" Mr. Pierce of Exeter, awoke at this call, and in a printed letter addressed to Dr. Snape, entitled, "The Dissenters' Reasons for not writing in behalf of Persecution," proved that the bishop of Bangor had attacked no ecclesiastical powers which the dissenters were disposed to defend. He showed, that, whatever veneration dissenters entertained for Calvin, as an eminent Reformer, they neither bowed to him as infallible, nor approved of all his actions, but unequivocally condemned his conduct towards Servetus. In this much censured act, Pierce candidly declared that Calvin acted as nearly all others, whether protestants or catholics, would have acted at that early period, when the benevolent doctrine of Christian freedom was so little understood. With admirable coolness of temper, keenness of irony, and elegance of style, he proved that the dissenters were delighted to see the bishop of Bangor lay the axe to the root of persecution, "which," says he, "if we have not yet learned to abhor, it must be confessed that the high church party has not yet treated us with sufficient severity." To evince that the dissenters were not practising, as Dr. Snape insinuated, a temporary political dereliction of their principles, in order to give Hoadly an opportunity to sap the foundations of the church of England, their last address to the king was quoted, in which they said, "our principles are, as we hope, the most friendly to mankind, and amounting to no more than those of a general toleration to all peaceable subjects, universal love and charity to all Christians, and to act always in matters of religion as God shall give us light in his will about them."

While the famous Bangorian contest was so zealously and

* Hoadly's Postscript, p. 254.

successfully conducted, another great dispute arose, and was conducted chiefly by the dissenters, which, though carried on with equal warmth as the former, was the means of exposing the inconsistencies of certain professed friends of Christian freedom, and of discovering with greater clearness the only true grounds of religious liberty. This was the controversy upon the doctrine of the Trinity, and of subscription to human creeds and articles of faith. The dispute commenced at Exeter, but presently extended to London, and through many parts of the country. We shall notice this great contest only so far as it affected the great cause of religious freedom.

In the early part of this reign the doctrines of arianism began more openly to prevail in several places, but particularly in the city of Exeter, where Mr. Hallet and Mr. Pierce were ministers. A few of their people, who were said to be in the confidence of these ministers, spoke disrespectfully of the orthodox doctrine, charged the common notions of the Trinity with blasphemy, and argued boldly in defence of arianism. Some they brought over to their opinions, while others were filled with horror at their impiety. The city was presently in a blaze: the favourers of the new doctrine and the converts were active and bold; and great alarm was felt for the purity of divine truth, by the friends and advocates of orthodoxy. The controversy spread from Exeter, through the neighbouring country, and excited painful alarm in the minds of all zealous ministers. When, therefore, the assembly of Devon and Cornwall came together, the distracted state of some of the churches, the apprehended defection of some of the ministers and people, and the distress of the most pious on account of the prevalence of the new opinions, influenced the assembly to take the subject into consideration. As suspicion had been entertained of some of the body, it was proposed and adopted, that each of the ministers should make a confession of his faith upon the doctrine of the Trinity, either in the words of the first article of the church of England, or in the answers to the fifth and sixth questions of the Assembly's Catechism, or in appropriate words of his own selection. Some opposition was made, but it was over-ruled; and the ministers, beginning with the oldest, uttered a declaration of their belief. Mr. Hallet's was wholly in words of Scripture; but Mr. Pierce's in his own

words. Some refused to declare their sentiments; and these, as well as the Exeter ministers, excited strong suspicions.

Soon after this meeting, various pamphlets were published in favour of arianism, and industriously circulated among the people. They were filled with loud outcries against blasphemy, imposition, persecution, inquisition, and tests. While this controversy was warmly agitated in the west of England, the metropolis felt its powerful influence. The dissenters there had their peace disturbed by the proceedings which took place in consequence of an application made to some of their ministers for advice. The London ministers were exceedingly desirous to restore harmony between the pastors of Exeter and their congregations; and some of their number, who felt deeply for their sorrows, drew up a paper of advices, which they conceived to be particularly suited to the occasion, and delivered it to the general committee of the three denominations. After this paper had undergone repeated discussion, they concluded themselves unauthorized to send it to Exeter in their own name; but, since it was to them extremely important, and concerned the general welfare of the churches, they called together all the dissenting ministers in London and its vicinity; that, if it were approved by them, it might be sent to the west, strengthened with all the weight of their united recommendation.

The general body being called together, it was agreed in a numerous assembly to consider the paper with minute attention. Some progress was made on the first day of meeting; and in the proceedings on the second day, one of them proposed that the advices should be accompanied with a declaration of their own faith in the doctrine of the Trinity. Such a step, he said, would give them greater weight with the friends of truth, and serve to discountenance the votaries of error. An eager debate was the consequence of this motion, and it was carried by a majority of fifty-seven to fifty-three, that a declaration concerning the Trinity should not be inserted in the paper of advices. By those who espoused the sentiments of the nonsubscribers, this decision was celebrated as the triumph of liberty over oppression, of liberality over bigotry, of divine authority over human usurpation, and of the sacred Scriptures over creeds and confessions of faith.

These proceedings made an impression equally powerful on the minds of the opposite party, who felt deeply concerned in the decision of the great question. The refusal of their ministers to make a declaration of their faith in the doctrine in dispute, awakened, in the minds of many private Christians, a fear that they either did not believe the doctrine of the Trinity, or were not so zealous for it as they ought to have been. These fears were loudly expressed; and a considerable number of the ministers perceived the agitation on the hearts of the most pious of their flocks, which it was of the utmost importance to allay. With this view, when they assembled the third time, a motion was made, that, without relation to the advices, and as a step entirely distinct, the ministers should make an explicit declaration of their belief of the doctrine of the Trinity, and especially of the divinity of Christ, which was the subject agitated in the west. This measure, it was urged, became necessary, in order to vindicate themselves from the misrepresentations which were gone abroad against their character, to give satisfaction to the members of their respective congregations, and to exhibit their sentiments to the dissenters in general throughout the kingdom.

The moderator on this occasion, conceiving the motion to be an interruption of the business under consideration, refused to put it to the vote. Sixty of the ministers, highly displeased with his conduct, immediately withdrew from the assembly; and meeting together in another place, they unanimously resolved to adopt the words of the first article of the church of England, and the answers to the fifth and sixth questions of the Assembly's Catechism, as a form of words in which the Scripture doctrine of the Trinity is professedly expressed. Both the subscribing and nonsubscribing ministers were equally steadfast in the belief of the doctrine in question; and after holding their separate assemblies, they both communicated their advices to the dissenters at Exeter, earnestly recommending the exercise of moderation, peace, and love. But their counsels arrived too late: the ministers were already dismissed.

The dissenting ministers in the west, roused by the proceedings in London to a more thorough investigation of the subject, thought that something still remained to be done in order

to testify their firm adherence to the orthodox faith. When, therefore, the Exeter assembly was convened at its half yearly meeting, the doctrine of the Trinity naturally became the topic of conversation. It was resolved to publish their sentiments upon this point more explicitly to the world; and they thought they could not do this in a more unexceptionable manner, than by affixing their names to the first article of the church of England. It was accordingly subscribed by the ministers of Devon and Cornwall to the number of fifty-six; who accompanied their subscription with a letter of advice to their respective congregations—"to adhere steadfastly to the received doctrine of the ever blessed Trinity." Nineteen however professed to act on the principles of the nonsubscribers in London, and refused their concurrence; among these were the two Exeter ministers.

Those fifty-six ministers who subscribed, having espoused the cause of their subscribing brethren in London, also addressed a letter to them, and expressed their sentiments in the following words: "We, the united ministers of Devon and Cornwall, are very sensible of the great service you have done to the common cause of Christianity in so open and vigorous an opposition to the dangerous error relating to the doctrine of the holy Trinity, which of late has been so industriously propagated, and take this opportunity, now that we are assembled together, to express our joy in the harmony that is between us, and our thanks for your seasonably interposing in a matter of so great importance." To prevent, if possible, the introduction of arianism, they entered into a resolution that no person should be admitted to preach as a candidate, nor ordained by them, nor recommended to any congregation, unless he gave them satisfaction of his soundness in the faith, by subscribing the first article of the church of England, and the answers to the fifth and sixth questions in the Assembly's Catechism, or assenting to the collective sense of the preceding assembly: *viz.* "That there is but one living and true God, and that the Father, Word, and Holy Ghost are that one God," or in his own words equally expressive of the same sense.

Here the interference of public bodies terminated; but the controversy continued to be agitated very extensively by indi-

viduals, when multitudes of pamphlets were published by both parties. According to the prevailing sentiment, the subscribing ministers were principally in the wrong. They have been charged with no inconsiderable load of guilt; and are said to have denied the sufficiency of the holy Scriptures, to have been advocates of human authority in spiritual things, and enemies to religious liberty and free inquiry. The general question as to the propriety of drawing up tests of orthodoxy, or forms of church government, and demanding subscription from every candidate for the pastoral office, as an indispensable condition of his admittance, undoubtedly had a direct bearing upon the rights and liberties of Christians. The zealous advocates of human creeds and confessions have always insisted on the advantages of uniformity in an ecclesiastical community, and the importance of securing to the people the blessings of sound doctrine; but the history and experience of centuries has successfully demonstrated the inefficacy of such precautions, which have been too powerful temptations for bad men to prevaricate in sacred things, and the great evil of excluding men of conscience who cannot say amen to every punctilio in the multifarious creed.*

The multiplied discussions and publications upon this point, contributed greatly to the discovery of truth, and to the diffusion of more liberal sentiments. The controversy was generally carried on under the influence of too much warmth; but its effects, by discovering more clearly the only true grounds of Christian freedom, were beneficial to society, and the church of God. Even that warmth and improper feeling with which the contest was conducted, demonstrated to the zealous partisans, upon more cool and deliberate reflection, the importance of exercising greater Christian candour, forbearance, and moderation; and it stands on record to expose the obscure views and imperfections of our forefathers, while it affords a useful lesson to posterity.

Among the events favourable to religious liberty, may be enumerated the fall of bishop Atterbury, the Goliath of priestly dominion and intolerance. On the opening of the parliament in October, 1722, the king observed, in his speech from the

* Bogue and Bennett, vol. iii. p. 220—239.

throne, that he was extremely sorry to inform them, that a dangerous conspiracy had been for some time maturing, and was still carrying on against his person and government, in favour of a popish pretender; that the discoveries made at home, the declarations of his ministers abroad, and the intelligence received from the various powers of Europe, had afforded him ample and concurrent evidence of this wicked design. In reply to his majesty's speech, the two houses of parliament expressed their indignation against the authors and abettors of the conspiracy, containing assurances that they would cheerfully hazard their lives and fortunes in defence of his majesty's person and government. The regent of France was the first who communicated to the king information of the conspiracy, in which many persons of the first distinction were concerned.*

In this state of alarm, Dr. Atterbury, bishop of Rochester, several of the lay peers, and Mr. Lyster, a barrister, were committed prisoners to the tower. Upon the discovery of this plot, which was called "Atterbury's plot," lord Townsend, by his majesty's command, communicated intelligence to the lord-mayor of London: "That several of his majesty's subjects had entered into a wicked conspiracy in concert with traitors abroad, for raising a rebellion in this kingdom, in favour of a popish pretender." The lord-mayor and court of aldermen immediately returned their address to the king, saying—"When we reflect on the many blessings which Britons enjoy under the protection of a prince, who makes the laws of the land his rule for the government of his people; when we consider that neither the civil nor religious rights of your majesty's subjects have met with the least violation, since your majesty's happy accession to the throne of these realms; when we recollect your majesty's royal clemency and benevolence, since the last rebellion, to numbers of those who had offended in the highest degree against their king, and the laws of their country, we cannot but express the utmost abhorrence of those vile and detestable persons, Atterbury and others, who shall again conspire and attempt to bring a free and happy people under the yoke and tyranny of superstition, and to involve this nation in a state of misery, confusion, and blood."

In reply to this loyal address, his majesty said—"Your

* Clarke, vol. iii. p. 93.

interest and mine are, and ever must be inseparable, and I doubt not, that, with the blessing of God, the precaution I have taken, and your firm adherence to our just cause, will soon convince our enemies, that their wicked designs can end in nothing but their own confusion. You may depend upon my constant care and utmost endeavours to support the public credit, to protect the privileges and properties of this great and opulent city, and to maintain the religion, laws, and liberties of this kingdom.”*

In conformity to the allowance of parliament, a bill was introduced to inflict upon the bishop certain pains and penalties, which the mover prefaced with the prediction concerning Judas: “Let his habitation be desolate, and his bishopric let another take.” He then moved “that it appears to this house, that Francis, lord bishop of Rochester, was principally concerned in forming, directing, and carrying on the said wicked and detestable conspiracy for invading these kingdoms, and for raising insurrections and rebellion at home, in order to subvert our present happy establishment in church and state, by placing a popish pretender on the throne.”

The bishop pleaded against the bill before the lords, with much strength of mind and eloquent persuasion,† but all in vain: for he was found guilty, and was condemned to perpetual banishment, and after some years he died at Paris. Mr. Layer, another of the conspirators, being tried and found guilty, was executed at Tyburn, and his head fixed on Temple Bar.‡ The evidence, on which the bishop was hurled from his lofty situation, stripped of all his honours, and sent to bear the accumulated ills of comparative poverty, painful disease, and extreme old age in a foreign land, was not considered as the most substantial. Our sympathy for the sufferings of the old man is greatly diminished by the consideration, that he was an unrelenting foe to those rights, which of all others ought to be dearest to accountable immortal creatures. To the whole host of advocates for dominion over conscience the fall of their Goliath was a mortifying and dreadful blow, while it proportionably inspirited the friends of free inquiry and unlimited tole-

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 723. † Biog. Britan. vol. i. p. 342.

‡ Clarke, vol. iii. p. 93.

ration, who now rallied round the throne of king George, and enjoyed his warmest patronage.

The king made a tour through the western parts of the kingdom, and was every where received with the liveliest satisfaction. The dissenters, being the firm advocates of Christian freedom, were of course eager to testify their joy at the triumph of the house of Hanover over their old enemies and persecutors, and in the address which their ministers presented on this occasion to the king, they expressed in strong language those sensations which their known principles must produce. Alluding to Atterbury's plot, they said—"It grieves us that our native country should produce such monsters of ingratitude and perfidiousness. We are at a loss to express how much we abhor their practices; and as for their principles which lead to them, we cannot but account them as foolish as they are impious. We assure your majesty, that we, as ministers of the Gospel of peace, are fully determined always to recommended loyalty and fidelity to your majesty and your government; and it is no small satisfaction to us, that we are engaged with a people so well disposed as the body of protestant dissenters, of whom we can with safety declare, that, in all parts of the kingdom, they adhere most inviolably to your majesty as their rightful and lawful sovereign, and are very sensible of the many blessings of your auspicious reign." His majesty received their address very kindly, and said—"Your steady and constant adherence and affection to my person and government give you a most just title to my protection, on which you may always depend."*

The religious rights of the people had many zealous and firm advocates during this period; among whom, in addition to the bishop of Bangor, it would be improper not to mention Dr. Benjamin Ibbot, one of his majesty's chaplains. This court divine displayed his superior liberality and good sense, in his celebrated sermon before the lord-mayor and the court of aldermen; on which occasion he stated and defended unrestricted religious liberty, as the indubitable birthright of all professing Christians, and with a strength of argument that may be deemed unanswerable. The reader will no doubt be gratified with the following copious abstract:

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 731.—Bogue and Bennett, vol. iii. p. 149.

It is plain that *civil government* was instituted for the preservation and advancement of men's *civil* interests, for the better security of their lives, liberties, and outward possessions. For these purposes, men soon became sensible of the necessity of civil government, from the inconveniences they suffered by a private life independent on each other. In such a state, unless every man would keep strictly to the rules of justice and equity, which the pravity of human nature, and long experience forbid us ever to expect; the weak would become a prey to the strong; every one would lie at the mercy of him that was mightier than himself; and the world would be full of fraud and injustice, cruelty and oppression.

No sooner did mankind begin to multiply, and to contract new relations and new duties, than their interests interfered with one another, and innocently gave rise to those wrongs and injuries which daily increased in the world, and presently moved men to enter into societies, for the mutual security and defence of their persons and properties, both against foreign and domestic violence. For these ends and purposes, societies were at first erected and grounded upon mutual compact and agreement of those who entered into them, to assist and protect each other. To repel violence, there must be external force and strength, which consist in arms, riches, and multitude of hands; the remedy consists in wise and wholesome laws, agreed upon by the society; and the care of both is, by common consent, committed to the civil magistrate, who is armed with the force and strength of all his subjects, in order to put these laws in execution.

From this brief account of the nature and design of *civil* government, it plainly appears that the proper business of the magistrate is to preserve the external peace of society, and the temporal welfare of the community over which he presides; to protect every man in his just right and property; and to see that "no man go beyond, and defraud his brother in any matter:" and to this end, to inflict proper punishments, and "execute wrath upon them that do evil;" to restrain and chastise those who are unruly, who transgress the laws, and violate the rights of others; who are guilty of any of those crimes which are injurious to society, which disturb the peace of government, and endanger men's lives and properties: such as fraud, injus-

tice, oppression, perjury, theft, and murder. All these fall under the censure and cognizance of the civil magistrate ; and it is his office and business to restrain men from such outrages as these, by bringing the offenders to condign punishment.

It ought, however, to be recollected, that these transgressions are to be punished by the civil magistrate in a *civil* sense only, and not in a *religious* sense. They fall under his cognizance as they are injurious to men's *civil* interests, and destructive of the good order and government of the world ; and not as they have an inherent turpitude in them, and are immoralities and transgressions of the divine law : in this latter sense, I conceive, they are out of the magistrate's power, and not cognizable before any court of human judicature. This distinction being overlooked has introduced no small confusion upon this subject.

Those vices which are transgressions of God's law, it must be allowed, have also a natural tendency to injure our neighbour's *civil* interests, and to disturb the good order and government of the world ; therefore it unavoidably follows, that the magistrate, in the due execution of his office, does *indirectly* meddle with religion. I say *indirectly*, because religion is not his proper business, nor ought he *directly* to intend it in the execution of his office. For *that* is the care and concern of a Higher Power, and is to be promoted by rewards and punishments peculiar to itself, and fetched from another world.

We cannot actually separate the ill influence which any vice has upon society, from its turpitude as a transgression of the divine law ; yet we may make this separation in our minds, and consider every vice as a mixed action ; as a transgression of the laws of man, and of the laws of God. In the former sense only, it is the subject of human jurisdiction ; in the latter, it is cognizable only before the tribunal of heaven. As it is "a matter of wrong, or wicked lewdness," and so injurious to any private person, or any breach of the public peace, it is certainly the magistrate's duty to restrain and punish it : but, as it is a transgression of the rules of morality and religion, it is equally certain that it belongs only to the Supreme Lawgiver, even to God himself, to require an account. The reason is obvious. Vicious actions are punishable by the civil

magistrate only on a *civil* account. Human laws make an estimate of sins from the damage they do to private persons, or to the public good, and inflict the greatest punishment upon those which are most prejudicial to society. This is the only rule the magistrate has to direct him in the punishment of offenders. If there be any sins, therefore, wherein society is no way concerned, which it neither feels, nor is affected with, the magistrate has no right to punish them. And in those sins which in their own nature are prejudicial to men's *civil* interests, if they did no injury to any person, and had no ill influence upon the welfare of society, they could not be the proper subjects of civil punishments. Nothing is so, but what some way or other injures a private person or the public weal.

With respect to the law of God, the case is far otherwise. *He* takes an estimate of our sins by other measures, from those degrees of light and knowledge against which the offence is committed, and often punishes those sins most which are least, or not at all, censured by the civil powers. Thus anger and revenge are murder in his sight, and lustful thoughts and desires are adultery in the heart; and the determination and intention to commit any sin, with him, amounts to sin, though on account of fear, or shame, or want of opportunity, it never be actually committed. Those sins which the civil magistrate does not punish, because they do not prejudice men's *civil* interests, may render persons highly criminal before God, and will be punished accordingly: as covetousness, pride, sensuality, murmuring, ingratitude, envy, malice; I say, these and numberless others, of which human laws can take no hold, can neither punish the sinner, nor prevent the sin, are expressly condemned, and have heavy penalties annexed to them in the law of God.

Hence it is abundantly evident, that the end and design of civil government is wholly directed to the care of men's *civil* rights, and consequently, that the office of the civil magistrate is wholly confined to those rights alone, and that religious matters, *as such*, lie out of the verge of his power. Religion, in a true and proper sense, and as the word imports, is an obligation upon us to God *alone*. Therefore, though men formed themselves into societies for *civil* reasons, they did not do it upon any *religious* account; because religion is a trans-

action between a man's self and God, and in which no other is concerned: so it equally requires our religious obedience at all times, and in all places, in solitude as well as in society, under whatever government we live, or whether we live under no government at all. That which makes religious worship most acceptable to God, is open to his heart-searching view alone; and that is the worship of him "*in spirit and in truth.*" This religion took place before societies were formed, and is older, as well as of different origin, than any civil establishments. It commenced with our creation: it is contemporary with human nature, and began with the race of man. It came not from the will or invention of man; but is grounded upon the will and law of God, who has rewards and punishments, and power sufficient to call to account the proudest offender. Whereas commonwealths were founded and governments instituted long after, by the will and invention of man, and for reasons and ends quite different.

Before the institution of civil governments, religion, as it related to God alone, had no other power upon men than what arose from the fear and reverence of God, being a perfect stranger to all human power, and outward force; and every one embraced that religion which his own reason dictated, or revelation discovered to him, and had the right of ordering for himself the external circumstances of his religious worship. In all these things, every one was left to his own liberty, and was accountable to God alone. In this state, no man whatever could require me to conform to his judgment in religious matters, nor could I require him to conform to mine. But if any man out of charity to my soul, and believing himself to be in the right, has a mind to bring me over to his opinion, he must convince me by persuasive arguments, that he is in the right, and I in the wrong; but he must use no outward force or compulsion of any kind: for this plain reason, because the care of every man's own soul belongs to himself alone, and to use any force or violence is not only unjust, but wholly insignificant and useless.

There is this remarkable difference between men's civil or temporal rights, and their religious or spiritual rights, that the former are alienable, and may in some cases, by their own consent, be restrained or remitted for the greater advantage of

others : but their religious or spiritual rights are their *unalienable* property, in the enjoyment of which they cannot in justice be restrained, and which they cannot give up in any case or upon any account whatever. Men cannot abandon the care of their souls, as they may that of their bodies and estates, and blindly leave it to the magistrate to prescribe what faith or worship they shall embrace ; not only because the care of every man's soul belongs to himself, but because " every one of us must give an account of *himself* to God."

If we place religion in the belief of any set of doctrines, or in the practice of any particular forms or modes of divine worship ; every man must judge and choose for himself ; must believe those doctrines which he thinks to be true, and worship God in such a manner as he is persuaded is most acceptable to him. The magistrate has no right in this case to interpose, or to apply force of any kind, with a view to bring them over to any particular persuasion. This is plainly foreign to his office, and stepping beyond the bounds of his duty. The peace and good order of society, are the only points which he is to take care of ; and, as these may be as well secured by men holding different religious opinions, as they are by being of different sentiments on other subjects, the magistrate has no more right to intermeddle in religious disputes, than he has in those of philosophy, law, or physic. Whatever may be their errors, the magistrate must use no outward force or violence to compel them, but leave them to the just judgment of God, as their own proper Master, to whom they must stand or fall.

If the magistrate interpose, and make himself a judge and a revenger in affairs which are purely of a religious nature, he will transgress the bounds of his duty, and invade the prerogative of God. This will be to judge and misuse the servants of another master, who are not in such matters at all accountable to him. Nothing can be more clear or certain, than that religion has God for its only author, therefore it ought to be performed and presented to him alone. The laws of religion are the laws of God only, and he has appointed all the rewards and punishments. He has taken the whole of this matter upon himself, and has no where authorized any man, or any body of men on earth, to be his deputies or vicegerents in these matters. It is highly unjust and wicked in any man to usurp any

authority over others in cases of a religious nature, or in matters of faith and conscience. In all such things, God has laid down the rule of our actions, and not left it for others to prescribe to us. He has set before us our duty, and told us that he will judge of the performance: so that for any man to exercise power over us, is to forestal the judgment of God, and to take the cause of God out of his hands.

All such attempts are not only unjust and wicked, but foolish and fruitless; because all religion consists in a free and willing choice, in the consent and approbation of the mind, in the sincerity and integrity of our hearts, in a full persuasion of the truth of what we believe, and of the amiableness of what we practise. Whatever we do in religion, we must “do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men;” in obedience to his command—in compliance with his will. But of what use can human laws be in all this, though enforced by civil penalties? They may make me do things which are in my power, and depend upon my will: but to believe this or that doctrine to be true, is not in my power, nor depends upon my will, but upon the light, evidence, and information which I possess. Will civil discouragements and incapacities, fines and confiscations, stripes and imprisonments, enlighten our understandings, convince nor minds of error, and inform them of the truth? Can they have any efficacy to make men change the judgment of their souls? Nothing can do this, but reason and argument. To this will our understandings and minds naturally yield; but they cannot be compelled to believe any doctrine by outward force. So that the promotion of true religion by penal laws is plainly out of the magistrate’s power, as well as beside his office: no human laws can produce that devout obedience of heart and conscience, nor that thorough persuasion of the truth of what we believe and practise, without which no outward compliance nor any thing else will be of any account.

If, therefore, the civil magistrate either chooses a religion for me, or enforces that which I have chosen, with temporal rewards and punishments, he spoils and destroys my religion. If he impose upon me, and force me to profess, for he cannot make me believe, a religion which I do not think to be true, he makes me a dissembler and a hypocrite, and exposes me to

the reproaches of my own heart, and the just vengeance of God : which is highly unreasonable and absurd, especially as the end of religion is to enjoy the favour of God, and the peace of our own consciences. If he force me to profess and practise the true religion, and what I believe, he at the same time destroys the excellency of this religion, and deprives me of my reward in heaven. Whatever I do in religion out of force and constraint, upon worldly motives and considerations, out of fear of the civil powers, or the like, it is no religion at all, but mere obedience to man, and there is no virtue in any actions performed upon such principles. The only foundation of all true religion consists in internal sincerity, in the obedience of the heart and conscience, and in worshipping God in spirit and in truth. Temporal rewards and punishments, the countenance or terrors of men, have no tendency to promote those things wherein true religion consists : they can neither convince the understanding, nor rule the heart, nor lead men to receive the truth.

So long as men behave themselves quietly and peaceably towards the government under which they live ; so long as they do no wrong or injustice to their neighbour, nor in any way injure their civil rights, they may and ought to be left to themselves in the choice of their religion, and be allowed to worship God according to their own views, and in that way which appears to them most acceptable to him. This is their natural right, and there can be no greater instance of injustice and oppression, than in any way to abridge it, or deprive them of it. Absolute liberty, therefore, in matters of religion and conscience, however it has been vilified and exclaimed against, is as much every man's just right, as any other thing which can be mentioned : and persecution, however meritorious blind zeal and bigotry have made it, is as flagrant cruelty and oppression, as plunder, imprisonment, and murder.

The magistrate ought to be so far from thus persecuting any of his subjects, on account of their differing from him in religion, that it is a principal duty incumbent upon him to take care that different sects and parties do not persecute one another. His business is to protect people of all religious opinions and persuasions, from being insulted by those from whom they differ, and from suffering any thing on the score of such

difference. It is nothing to him what false and erroneous opinions men hold, what ridiculous and absurd doctrines they profess, or, in short, what they believe or disbelieve in religion, so long as they do not injure their neighbour, nor make any alteration in men's civil rights, nor disturb the public peace. The end and design of civil government is not to provide for the truth of men's religious opinions, but for the security of their persons and goods.

Since, therefore, religion and civil government are, in their original, end, business, and in every thing belonging to them, thus perfectly distinct, and entirely different from each other; it would put an end to many controversies, and make very much for the peace and quiet both of church and state, if men would observe this distinction, and each party keep within its own proper bounds. This would hinder them from clashing and interfering with one another, and would prevent those heats and animosities, those acts of violence, rapine, cruelty, and oppression, which have abounded in the Christian world on account of religion.

Let the ministers of the Gospel keep to their duty. Let them preach the Gospel of peace, and not sound the trumpet of war. Let them mind their own business, which is the salvation of men's souls, by teaching and persuading them, both by their doctrine and example, publicly and privately, "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world:" and let them not stretch themselves beyond their line, by meddling with the affairs of state, and making themselves more the ministers of government, than the ministers of Jesus Christ.

If civil magistrates and ministers of the Gospel, would thus confine themselves within their own bounds, there would be the most exact harmony and agreement between them; and we might hope to see the prophet's prediction fulfilled, concerning the happy state of the church and kingdom of Christ: "When the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. When the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. When the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned

child on the cockatrice's den. When they shall not hurt, nor destroy in all God's holy mountain."

These are the philanthropic sentiments of the loyal chaplain; whence we learn how highly the principles of unmolested religious liberty were then revered. The reasoning and arguments of this court doctor, may be deemed unanswerable. His opinions eminently display his superior good sense, and the liberality and benevolence of his mind. The great cause of religious freedom, thus countenanced at court, made rapid progress during this period; which was considerably accelerated by the events detailed in this section. Reproaches, fines, and jails had been the common lot of our forefathers. They had formerly met with cruel mockings; had been scornfully reviled, as schismatics, fanatics, and rebels, the body of the nation being exasperated against them. The case was now otherwise. There were few comparatively who grudged the common liberty, except those who were so weak and ill-tempered as to think themselves persecuted, merely because they were prevented from persecuting others. This disposition, so hostile to humanity and common sense, was generally detected and discountenanced. Those who charged the friends of religious freedom with faction, and sedition, as they had done their forefathers, made themselves ridiculous and contemptible; since the friends of liberty were the only friends of king George, and the illustrious house of Hanover. "We are no longer liable," says one who lived in these times, "to be insulted and pillaged by beggarly informers, hauled before civil magistrates, or preyed upon by ecclesiastical courts. We are not cited into the crown office, or terrified with writs *de excommunicates capiendis*, which our fathers often found troublesome and chargeable. We are not liable to have our goods seized, our books taken away and sold, our families stripped and impoverished; or to be forced to quit our native country, abjure the realm, and retire into foreign parts; or to lie starving and rotting in jails at home."*

These advantages they prized and improved. The closing scene was the most painful. Not long after the events here recorded, the king set out for Hanover, and was arrested on

* Calamy's Contin. vol. i. Dedic.

the road by the cold hand of death, June 22, 1727, in the sixty-eighth year of his age, and the thirteenth of his reign. His majesty was admired for his wisdom, justice, clemency, firmness, and moderation. His love and concern for the welfare of his subjects were those of a father to his children, and their duty and affection those of children to a parent. The serenity and benignity of his mind astonished and captivated all who approached him. As the former part of his life was spent in arms, so was the latter in the security of the religion and liberties of his people. He was a prince endowed with all royal virtues.* Next to the hero of our glorious revolution, the lovers of religion, and patrons of the rights of conscience, will ever cherish the memory of him who founded the regal dynasty of the house of Brunswick. The protestant dissenters must, with peculiar delight, tell their children how he came to snatch their dearest liberties from threatened destruction; with what dignified firmness he covered their churches with the broad shield of justice; how many of their present privileges were restored to them by his wise and just administration; and how much more he intended which the ignorance, prejudice, and intolerance of the times forbade him to accomplish.

While the patrons of liberty felt their security under the peaceful shade of religious toleration, the state of religion was various in different religious communions. Arianism made considerable progress during this period, especially among the presbyterians; many of whom, however, still retained their orthodoxy. They differed widely among themselves. By some the old puritanical doctrines and devotions were retained, which contributed greatly to the honour of their character; while others, holding the same creed, were more cold and formal in their religious profession: this variety prevailed equally among ministers and private Christians. Among the different denominations, where evangelical doctrine was faithfully and unreservedly preached, the people felt its divine power and influence; sinners were converted to God, and believers were edified in faith and holiness. Where the preaching, though pure, was dull and cold, the effect was in general less visible; cold-

* Hist. of Stuarts, vol. iii. p. 807, 808.

ness seized the hearts of the people. Where evangelical truth was scantily brought forwards, and sparingly interwoven in the discourses of the pulpit, which unhappily was the case with too many who professed the orthodox doctrine, its effects were still more feeble; and in proportion as preachers and hearers receded in their views from the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ, the beneficial influence lamentably decayed and disappeared.



CHAPTER VI.

THE REIGN OF KING GEORGE II.



SECTION I.

The liberal Extension of the benefits of Toleration.

GEORGE the Second, on the death of his father, ascended the throne of these realms, under circumstances the most auspicious. He was in the prime of life, and already the popular favourite. He had married a princess of superior accomplishments. He was well skilled in the art of government, having been accustomed, during his father's absence from the kingdom, to the weight of the British sceptre, which he well knew how to wield. The friends of liberty and moderation hailed him as the heir of the protestant succession; while the contrary party, who had opposed his father as an usurper of the throne of the Stuarts, renounced their principles and enmity against the son, whom they suffered quietly to receive the regal patrimony. The names of Hanoverians and Jacobites, which had divided the nation under George the First, were exchanged, during this reign, into those of the court and country party. By the banishment of Atterbury, and the

death of many of the most rigid nonjurors, the clergy were left under the influence of low churchmen, whom the late reign had exalted to the first posts in the establishment. The dissenters congratulated themselves on the quiet accession of a prince who owed his throne to those principles which constituted the distinguishing marks in their character. Being rendered more liberal themselves by the ease and security they enjoyed, they beheld with peculiar pleasure the growing liberality of many of the clergy, with whom they maintained both a literary, and an affectionate Christian correspondence.

The dissenters having been always the zealous and firm patrons of religious freedom, and having enjoyed so large a portion of it, with so much tranquillity, under George the First, naturally expected the continuance of it under his son. Upon reflection on the events of the past reign, they felt unbounded cause of gratitude and joy, with unshaken confidence that they should not receive less friendly treatment from George the Second. Immediately therefore on his accession, about a hundred of their ministers waited upon his majesty, when Dr. John Evans, in the name of the three denominations, presented their loyal address to the king, in which are contained these honourable declarations:

“The world is bereaved of one of the wisest and best of princes, and the reformed religion of its chief glory and defence: but the immediate and peaceful succession of George the Second, dries up our tears. We can assure your majesty of hearts full of loyalty and affection to your person and government, and so far as belongs to our stations and characters, we shall not fail both to teach the duties owing to crowned heads, and practise them ourselves on all occasions. It is with pleasure, we can further assure your majesty, that the protestant dissenters, we believe to a man, are in the same loyal sentiments. And we doubt not our continued share in those liberties which your majesty hath graciously declared are most dear to you. We rely upon your princely wisdom and care to do every thing that may strengthen and unite sincere Christians and protestants; and heartily wish our suffering brethren abroad the same blessings with ourselves.”

To their address his majesty returned the following gracious answer:—“I thank you for your loyal and affectionate address.

You may be assured of my protection, and of my care and attention to support the protestant interest."

The ministers were then introduced to the queen, and at the request of the body, Dr. Calamy addressed their loyal sentiments to her majesty, concluding "that they had nothing more at heart than the continuance and advancement of piety, truth and love, loyalty, liberty and property, and they promised themselves her majesty's countenance and protection."

The king, in his first speech to the council, after expressing his sorrow for the death of his father, declared his firm attachment to his subjects' rights and liberties, civil and religious, and his determination to maintain them inviolable. To the parliament he observed, that the kingdom was happy within its own bosom, and venerated by all foreign nations, adding—"I find among my subjects such mutual charity and forbearance diffused through the kingdom, that the national church repines not at the indulgence given to scrupulous consciences, and those who receive the benefits of the toleration envy not the established church the rights and privileges which they by law enjoy. From these happy causes have flowed that general tranquillity, that rise of public credit, and that increase of trade and commerce, which have greatly improved our wealth and power, and given us that respect and influence abroad which have so much advanced the glory and happiness of the nation." Having taken the oath which the constitution required, to support the church of Scotland, the king assured his northern subjects, by commission, that he was determined to support the *presbyterian* church in all its rights and privileges.

In the church of England, there still appeared some symptoms of the revival of high ecclesiastical claims. The clergy in convocation seemed disposed to seize the accession of a new prince, as a favourable opportunity to obtain deliverance from their restraint and inaction, to which they were grieved to find themselves reduced. Those of the province of Canterbury were twice prorogued; but before the latter prorogation was signified to the house, one of the members addressed the prolocutor in a remarkable speech, which was published in the journals of the times. The speaker observed, that as his majesty had answered the late address of both houses with an assurance that he would be ready on his part towards a vigor-

ous execution of the law against profaneness, blasphemy, and immorality, it would, doubtless, be more effectually accomplished if the representative of the church, that is to say, the convocation might point out to him what persons or things were most likely to promote or impede his royal and pious design. After admitting his majesty's undoubted prerogative to call the convocation, and to dictate the subjects of discussion, he added—that “it could not be deemed unseasonable for any dutiful son or servant, both of the church and state, to loosen his tongue-strings when the several parts and offices of our holy religion were exposed to mockery, and the doctrines and mysteries of religion were furiously attacked by men of profligate principles.” He then modestly proposed that deists and socinians should be “struck dumb by an awful censure from the convocation !”

The king well understanding the import of this harangue, did not choose to be instructed by the convocation “what persons and things” he should smite with the royal sceptre, nor did the court ministers think that this reverend and ecclesiastical body would frighten infidels to renounce their infidelity ; so that the vigorous policy of the preceding reign was still pursued, and the members of the convocation were scarcely placed in their seats before they were politely told to “go and feed the sheep which they had left in the wilderness.”

Never, indeed, was a king less under the influence and control of priests than George the Second. Far from being alarmed, as many of his predecessors had been, by having the affections of his subjects divided among the various ministers and professors of religion, he was assured it would prevent his throne from being shaken by the ambition and insolence of any one dominant party. He was, also, too great a lover of tranquillity to expose himself, or his kingdom, to the vexation of those ecclesiastical broils which had often risen in the convocation-house ; while he was too sincerely attached to the principles of toleration and the rights of conscience, to expose them to the mercy of the clergy, on the ridiculous pretence of crushing existing errors. Arians, socinians, sceptics, and deists were, therefore, left to fall by weapons much more formidable than the fulminations of a clerical convocation, which would have alarmed the friends of truth and freedom alone, while

infidels would have been confirmed in their hatred and contempt of a system, which, they said, threatened when it should have argued, and cursed when it should have blessed.

The intolerant spirit of the convocation too much prevailed among their reverend brethren in the country. Notwithstanding the protection of the laws, and the liberal interpretation put upon them by the government, these uncatholic gentlemen could not feel easy to behold the peace and prosperity of their neighbours, but exerted themselves in numerous instances to disturb their repose, and to deprive them of their religious privileges. It will be proper to select one instance out of many, for the information of the reader, showing what manner of spirit they were of. This is in the case of the excellent Dr. Doddridge, which is related by his biographer as follows :

The doctor was no sooner settled at Northampton, with the pleasing prospect of great usefulness, by his relation to a large congregation and the increase of his academy, than he met with injurious treatment from his neighbours. Not to mention various insults which he and his family suffered from the vulgar, through the influence of infatuated ignorance and party prejudice, a more formidable attack was made upon him from the neighbouring clergy, from whom he expected candour and moderation. A prosecution was commenced against him in the ecclesiastical court, by certain dignitaries of the church for teaching an academy. Persons of the best sense among different parties were surprised at this step ; and several gentlemen of the established church of considerable rank and of public character, warmly declared their disapprobation of it. Nay, the very person in whose name the prosecution was carried on, waited upon the doctor to assure him of his abhorrence of it ; and to know, before it commenced, whether he could with safety to himself, being then churchwarden, refuse to sign the presentment, or in any other way make the matter easy to him. But the clergy seemed determined to carry on the prosecution with vigour ; notwithstanding they made many acknowledgments of the doctor's learning and moderation, and for which they personally paid him many compliments. This gave him painful alarm, lest his usefulness as a tutor should have been entirely prevented, or greatly diminished ; or he should have been obliged to remove from his congregation to some other

part of the kingdom, where he might have been out of the reach of his persecutors. But his loyal, peaceable, and moderate principles and character, being fairly represented to the king, by certain persons of rank and influence, who had access to his majesty, and were well acquainted with the doctor, the liberalized monarch interposed his royal power, and, by his express order, a stop was put to the prosecution; agreeably to the noble and generous maxim which the king laid down, that, "during his reign, there should be no persecution for conscience' sake."*

While the only proper method of defending truth and of refuting error was too little understood, the influence of erroneous opinions was certainly shameless and incessant. The grand jury of the county of Middlesex having presented two infidel books to the court of King's Bench, their conduct was severely censured in a pamphlet, entitled, "Remarks upon two late Presentments of the Grand Jury, wherein are shown the folly and injustice of men's persecuting one another for difference of opinion in matters of religion, and the ill consequences wherewith that practice must affect any state in which it is encouraged." The grand jury then took offence at this castigation, and presented this publication, declaring "that the said author avowedly contends for a liberty to write in behalf of infidelity, and has, in violation of good manners, decency, and law, stigmatized the said late presentments as foolish and unjust, and branded them with the odious name of persecution. We, therefore, notwithstanding the insolent defiance which the late presentments of this nature have met with, and the discouragement which we apprehend may still make them and all others unsuccessful, unless supported by this honourable court, do present the said pamphlet as an impious and a scandalous libel, tending to the subversion of our religion, laws, and liberties, and hope this honourable court will give proper directions for punishing the author, printer, and publisher."†

The puritans and nonconformists had formerly been almost the only advocates of religious freedom; but now that they were in the peaceable enjoyment of that freedom for which they had suffered and bled, a new host, of a different genius,

* Doddridge's Works, vol. i. p. 149.

† Histor. Regis. for 1729.

arose under the shade of their toleration, to vex and torture those who loved to breathe only the stagnant air of cold indifference, or servile deference to established creeds, or anathemas against all the lovers of freedom. By the tone of the grand jury, it seems that the infidels pleaded for unrestrained freedom of sentiment in a more bold and dangerous style than had ever been adopted by the old puritans. In the government of the world, it is frequently observable, that if men will not learn truth and justice from the voice of wisdom and benevolence, they are compelled to hear it from terror and defiance, and that they who will not be taught by the rod of gentle correction must be chastised with scorpions. From this time, unbelievers availed themselves of the benefits of toleration, and endeavoured, by various methods, to overthrow those truths which the advocates of freedom accounted dearer than their lives. The increase of deists has, however, in some respects, tended to perpetuate and diffuse a tolerant spirit. While secret or avowed infidels have filled the high offices of state, they have invariably discountenanced narrow-minded priestcraft and bigoted intolerance, and have rendered it as unfashionable as it was absurd, impolitic, and iniquitous to attempt to bind the intellect of man in antichristian fetters.

Seeing the first advocates of toleration were pious Christians, and exceedingly mortified to the world, it was fashionable to hate them and their doctrine; but when they had, by the sacrifice of all that was dear to them in this life, secured their intellectual freedom, they were succeeded in their inestimable birth-right by men of the world, who, being unencumbered with scrupulous consciences, were admired for that charming indifference to religion, which will always fascinate a world in a state of alienation from God. The Christian advocates for toleration may, therefore, address the deists in the words of Christ: "Other men have laboured, but ye are entered into their labours. The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth, because I testify against the deeds thereof, that they are evil." There is, we hope, very little danger of seeing the world governed by speculative and avowed infidels, as it has too frequently been by the bigots to a false and intolerant religion. Who could assure us that deists would be more tender of the rights of conscience than monks or prelates? By an all-powerful Providence

much good sometimes arises out of much evil. During this period, the increase of those who were incredulous to the evidences of Christianity threw a powerful weight into the scale of toleration, and greatly contributed to render the reign of George the Second favourable to the rights of conscience.

An occurrence, however, of a more pleasing nature, and totally opposite from the former, now marked the progress of religious melioration, and greatly contributed to extend and perpetuate its peaceful domain. The rise of the *Methodists* displayed the happy difference between the state of the public mind at this time, and during the struggles of the puritans and nonconformists. When Wesley and Whitfield, with their coadjutors, began to attract public notice, both by the ardour of their zeal in the cause of religion, and by the novelty and boldness which they employed for its diffusion, they professed to be the true sons of the church of England; so that they properly came within the jurisdiction of the bishops, to whose government they were attached. They commenced their extraparochial meetings in the rooms of the societies for promoting the reformation of manners, which had been patronised by the government and the first authorities in the established church; but as these assemblies soon assumed an appearance which they, who were called the regular clergy, could not view without the eye of jealousy, the methodists were made to feel that they were obnoxious to their diocesans, who considered them as dangerous schismatics.

To have shown that episcopacy was not what the dissenters represented it, a mere non-entity, as to all effective spiritual regulations, the bishops should have summoned these anomalous churchmen to their bar; and, after examining the tenets and practices of methodism, either condemned it as an ebullition of fanaticism and error, or honoured it with their sanction as an auspicious revival of primitive zeal. But the days of Bonner, Whitgift, Bancroft, and Laud were gone by; and, since the wiser part of the spiritual authorities had no wish to try the hazardous experiment of reviving ancient restraints and compulsions, those who were less prudent and less tolerant were prevented by the temper of the prince and the spirit of the times, from adopting such coercive measures as might have reduced the new zealots within the bounds of a tame regularity.

The bishops, therefore, can scarcely be accused of having fallen into the error of their predecessors, by driving the methodists out of the establishment, and thus compelling them to form a new ecclesiastical communion. Their lordships did little more than look on with jealous eyes, and give that tone to the rest of the clergy, which soon led to the exclusion of these irregulars from the churches of all those who sought preferment.

Whitfield finding himself shut out of the pulpits in which he was expected to appear, seized the opportunity of preaching in the open air. He praised the heavens as the best sounding board ; but he soon found that a better roof was necessary to screen him from the rain and snow, which presently compelled him to seek some tabernacle, or temporary building, where he might preach whenever the sky should forbid him to take the field. In these buildings, the methodists were exposed to the insults of the rude mob, who had not yet forgotten the art of disturbing religious assemblies, nor entirely lost the relish of those delights which they enjoyed in terrifying those peaceable people whom they found in those assemblies. It, therefore, became necessary for the new sectarists, either to endure all the injuries which the nonconformists suffered for nearly thirty years, when they were considered as outlaws, or to violate their solemn professions of indissoluble union with the established church, by classing themselves with dissenters, taking refuge under the toleration act, registering their places of worship, and licensing their preachers, as that act required. The event clearly proved, that they were not so much in love either with persecution or the church of England, as to hesitate long between these unequal alternatives ; but instantly became dissenters in the eye of the law, in order to be Christians according to the dictates of conscience.

The *Moravians* were placed in similar circumstances, and driven to adopt the same experiment. They had long associated with the different reformed communions on the continent of Europe, and had usually dwelt secure under the protecting wing of the established church ; so that upon their introduction into England, a land of freedom and toleration, it seemed not unreasonable to expect the same liberality. As they retained the office of a bishop, with the use of a liturgy, they were by no means disposed to set up a separate sect from the English

establishment; but would have been exceedingly glad to have waited upon her as a tender nurse upon her children, and, without disputing the parental claims of the original, to have cherished them in a warmer bosom, and have fed them at fuller breasts than she could furnish. This, however, was rejected with disdain, and the moravians were compelled, by the disturbances to which they were exposed, to flee to the shelter which protects all those who are by law considered protestant dissenters.

It was, indeed, a curious phenomenon to behold a whole host of persons who rejected the name of dissenter as an unfounded calumny, who professed themselves the truest sons of the church, attached to her doctrines, ceremonies, and hierarchy, many of whom retained in their assemblies her liturgy and vestments, and who still communicated at her altars; yet resorting for protection, to “an act passed to exempt persons *dissenting* from the church of England from the pains and penalties of certain laws.”

The Wesleyan methodists were so extremely tenacious upon this point, that they openly issued their warning “against calling their society *a church*, or *the church*; against calling their preachers *ministers*, or their places of worship *meeting-houses*, but *plain preaching-houses* ;” while they openly denied that they were either *dissenters* or *seceders* from the established church.* Had they publicly professed themselves to be dissenters, it would have been questioned whether the toleration act could have afforded them legal protection; for neither this, nor any other law, could be intended to provide for all possible futurity, and to gather under its wing every sect, of whatever principles or practices, which might arise in the revolutions of ages. But when the methodists and moravians declared they were not dissenters, how could they claim the advantages of an act made expressly to protect persons dissenting from the church of England?

Such was the liberality of the times, during the beneficent reign of George the Second, that, whenever any class of society chose to ask the protection of the toleration act, the courts of law kindly considered them as dissenters, and defended them

* Minutes of Conference for 1749, and 1766.

in the quiet enjoyment of their principles and worship. Had not these silent and prudent measures been adopted, justice and liberty seemed to demand that an act should have been passed to defend the new sectarists from the unauthorized violence of the mob, and to rescue them from the degrading and perilous condition of holding their religion by mere sufferance, and so liable to be persecuted whenever a change of prince or ministers should feel an inclination to rob them of their dearest enjoyments. It would have been hard to punish them merely because they did not choose to call themselves dissenters, and to reward their lingering fondness for their old parent, by leaving them naked and defenceless.

The introduction of a new act would, no doubt, have been a delicate and difficult affair, which might have occasioned so much noise as to have raised the old evil spirit, which probably could not have been easily repressed. The politic conduct of the government, in choosing rather to give a large and liberal interpretation to the toleration act, was a grand step in the progress of religious liberty. This law was converted into a much more extensive and mighty blessing than it was originally intended. The presbyterians, independents, baptists, and quakers, were the persons for whom the act was made: but from the year 1730, it became an asylum, not only for every new sect which separated from the ecclesiastical establishment, but for all her own children who chose occasionally to play truant, and, like mendicant friars, to be at home or abroad, as best suited their convenience. Almost a century having now elapsed since this generous construction was put upon the law, it seems to have become the legal interpretation of its meaning and intent; so that we may say, not that religious toleration was perfect, but that it was become much more extensive than at any former period.

The methodists of every class, those who still remained within the walls of the established church, those who, like Whitfield, retained her doctrines, but broke loose from her restraints, and those who, with Wesley, adopted the arminian creed, all formed a body as active as they were new, when they put the practical liberality of the government and the nation to a severe test. The dissenters had long fixed upon a determinate character and conduct, their congregations were well

known in the various towns where they were settled, and their principles did not lead them to itinerant excursions beyond their own vicinity ; so that as they and the government were considered fast friends, they were not very much disturbed. The methodists, on the contrary, came forwards as a foreign army, they traversed the kingdom through all its extent : professing to belong to the established church, they entered into her precincts, sought their converts in her very bosom, and this roused attention, jealousy, and rage, by the novelty, nearness, and anomalous singularity of their attack.

The practice of field preaching, which Whitfield, their most intrepid champion, introduced, was a measure as daring as it was unprecedented. When the government heard that this wild son of the church drew out of London, the almost incredible number of thirty thousand persons to hear him on Kennington common ; when he regularly collected numbers, not much inferior, in Moorfields ; when the cautious Wesley imitated the bold measure, and rendered it a methodist fashion to stand upon Tower-hill, in the streets of Bristol, amidst the colliers at Kingswood, or Newcastle, the miners in Cornwall, or wherever immense crowds could be collected ; would it have been surprising, if the usual jealousy of governments had been displayed by the new dynasty, which just begun to sit firm on the British throne ? What, then, must have been the wisdom of the prince, and the conscious strength and dignity of the government, that in such untried and critical circumstances, all these innovations prevailed without limitation, and the rising sect not only gave neither alarm nor offence to the civil powers, but was even defended by the sword of authority.

Whenever mobs were excited by the depraved passions of the people, or by the insidious arts of gothic gentry or clergy, to disturb the worship of the methodists, though inferior magistrates often hesitated to give redress, the superior courts were a sure refuge, where, not scanty justice, but liberal countenance was afforded to the new species of dissenters. At Bristol, the magistrates instantly quelled the persecuting spirit of the populace, and placed the methodists in perfect peace and security. The London mob was more violent ; but the persecuted people had the satisfaction to be informed from high au-

thority, before they made application for redress, that they should not suffer the insults and injuries which they had experienced, since the justices of the peace had received particular orders from the government to afford them full protection. The house of Hanover being assured of the unshaken affections of the dissenters, regarded them as the firmest supporters of the throne: it is, therefore, not improbable, that this new accession to their number was far from being disagreeable to the court, which gladly extended to the methodists the protection originally designed for other denominations.

The infant sects thus quietly stepped into the enjoyment of privileges for which their predecessors had struggled, groaned, and died. The liberty to worship God, purchased by the dissenters at the price of ages of cruel persecution, the lives of thousands of their brethren who perished in prisons, and the sacrifice of property to an incalculable amount, became at once the inheritance of a people, many of whom were not very sensible of their obligations to those from whose generous and incessant labours, they now enjoyed the sweetest fruits. The new denominations had never been tried by that long and systematic oppression which their forefathers endured from the mighty arm of power; nor can it be now ascertained, whether, if the government had resorted to the same treatment of the methodists, they would not have shrunk into complete annihilation. Not having, like the other dissenters, any definite principles, which should make it a sacred duty to hold meetings separate from those in the parochial edifices, it is not improbable that the methodists owe their existence, under God, to the circumstance of their growing up at the side of the dissenters, under the shade of their toleration, cherished by the liberal maxims of government, which the nonconformists had contributed to establish.

The methodists having just emerged from the bosom of an exclusive establishment, owed more thanks to religious liberty, than she owes to them. George Whitfield, a man of a generous soul, quickly felt and justly appreciated the worth of his dissenting predecessors in the glorious work to which he consecrated his life: but John Wesley presents us with a striking contrast; though he loved and inculcated the rigid principles of churchmen, he acted upon the liberal and broad basis of the dissen-

ters. It was his constant care to carry the narrowness of the ecclesiastical establishment into his new species of dissent; and in order to keep his societies from sinking into dissenting churches, which he perceived to be their natural tendency, he not only framed a connective code of discipline, which should counteract the unavoidable propensity, but he also diffused through the system strong suspicions of the dissenters, whose blood had purchased the liberty which he was glad to enjoy. So far, therefore, as the spirit of the Wesleyan methodists was concerned, liberality in religion gained but little from their rise: nevertheless, in an indirect and unintentional way, the most happy and powerful effects were produced by the new separation from the established church. In addition to the very liberal interpretation given to the national code of jurisprudence, a powerful weight was thrown into the scale of *practical* liberty, vast numbers were added to the advocates of worship separate from the parochial assemblies, and a host of preachers unconsecrated by episcopal hands, not only published their doctrines, but administered the sacraments through the kingdom. Great multitudes thus became dissenters, and practical advocates of religious freedom, without knowing or intending it. Instead of the prejudices which were before awakened by the sight of a conventicle, it now appeared perfectly practicable to adopt all the essentials of dissent, and yet remain good churchmen, among people who professed to revere the church, but decidedly imitated the dissenters.

A favourable change was, at this eventful period, produced in the tone of many churchmen, who affected to be converted to a good opinion of those, who, upon principle, dissented from the episcopal church, and adopted sentiments nearly allied to the ecclesiastical establishment of Scotland; while they inveighed bitterly against those whom they stigmatized fanatics, for setting up their altars in opposition to the church, to which they pretended to be conscientiously attached. Thinking that the older sects were now grown sober, the establishment complimented them at the expense of the new separatists, who attempted to engraft all the ardour of a recent discovery, upon the established vigour of the dissenting stock. Thus religious liberty gained ground on every hand, and the friends of Christian freedom hailed even the most contracted of the new sects

as valuable, though unintentional, coadjutors in the cause of voluntary churches, and the rights of private judgment.

The rise of the methodists put the liberality of the old dissenters to the test. Being accustomed to regard themselves as the asylum of all who renounced the errors or the restraints of the establishment, they now beheld other communions rising up to share the same honours. What impartial judge of human nature will wonder, that the elder sects should look with some jealousy and strangeness upon a people emerging from the established church, without professing to differ from it, and yet combining this unaccountable latitude with no small quantity of church prejudices? When they beheld Mr. Wesley establishing a dissenting hierarchy, by means of an assembly of lay preachers and others, of which he himself possessed the largest share of authority, their disapprobation arose out of their attachment to religious liberty. It appeared to them immaterial whether an ecclesiastical synod was called a conference or a convocation, if such assembly assumed a legislative power and authority over the people. The methodist preachers in conference, as manifestly appears from their own printed annual minutes, invested themselves with this power and authority; they devised *new laws* for the whole body, which they enforced with new *pains* and *penalties*; and they appointed new orders of ecclesiastical discipline, with the whole system of methodism, which they commanded again and again to be punctually observed by all the members of their societies. At so late a period as the year 1796, in answer to this question, "Can any thing be done to stop the abuse of printing and publishing among us?" they decreed, that "no preacher shall publish *any thing* but what is *given* to the conference, and printed at *our press*: the book-committee to *determine what is proper to be printed*!"* Was there ever a more decisive attempt, at Rome or elsewhere, to bind in chains the liberty of the press?

To Mr. Whitfield and his followers the old dissenters, after mature acquaintance, felt liberally disposed. The indifference which this great man expressed for all the peculiarities of ecclesiastical order, appeared to them, not only unscriptural, but

* Minutes of Conference for 1796.

founded on the enthusiastic assumption, that he was called to mind greater things ; but his disinterested ardour of soul in the cause of catholic Christianity, won their hearts, and induced them in part to forget the imperfections of the man in the excellencies of the devoted minister. He was, therefore, welcomed to the bosoms, the abodes, and the pulpits of many, who thus proved that the peculiarities of their own communion were held in due subordination to the grand vital truths of the Gospel. Such phenomena of liberality were then exhibited, as the world would never before have thought credible : an independent pastor, educated at the regular academy of Homerton, preaching in the chapel of a clergyman, where the liturgy enjoined by the act of uniformity was read by a lay curate in a surplice !

These discordant materials could not unite without some previous collision. Where the spirit of religion was decaying among the members of a dissenting church, they sometimes made their differences of opinion a pretext for illiberal conduct towards Mr. Whitfield ; who, in his turn, gave them too much provocation by imprudent and unfounded reflections on the niceties of a system, the nature and evidence of which he had not studied. If Christian prudence induced some faithful ministers to stand aloof, till they could see the lawfulness of welcoming the new sect, Whitfield's youthful ardour too frequently branded them, though his superiors in knowledge and experience, with the odious character of dead formalists, who were feeding their flocks with the chaff of discipline, instead of the nutritious doctrines of grace.

When, however, the maturer judgment of this zealous hero detected his own error, he acknowledged it with an ingenuousness which bigots and persons of little minds would have considered a degradation, but which added greatly to the lustre of his meridian brightness, the enchanting mildness of a setting sun. In allusion to Peter's injudicious zeal in cutting off the ear of the high-priest's servant, he said—" many a man's ear have I cut off, by harsh censures on those who were faithful ministers of Christ." The re-action which these mistaken censures naturally produced, might give to the dissenters the appearance of illiberality towards the rising sects ; but, all circumstances impartially considered, they will be found to have

been as thoroughly imbued with the spirit of religious liberty, as we can reasonably expect men in this state of imperfection.*

Another important circumstance occurred during this reign showing clearly the extension of Christian freedom, and reflecting great credit on the sound principles and good sense of the parties respectively concerned. This was the revival and re-consideration of a *comprehension*, to which certain prelates and other dignitaries were favourably disposed. The agitation of the subject made a considerable noise at the time, both in town and country, as if it had been intended to pull down the church; when it was only intended to adopt those measures which would most assuredly have promoted her permanent security and reputation.

To exhibit the spirit of the parties concerned in this business, it will be necessary to remind the reader, that at this time a very excellent performance, which was deservedly honoured with a large share of the public approbation, appeared under the title of “Free and Candid Disquisitions” respecting the necessity of reforming the national church. The celebrated Dr. Warburton, a zealous churchman, gave his sentiments upon this subject in a letter to Dr. Doddridge, when he said—“As to the ‘Disquisitions,’ I will only say, that the temper, candour, and charity, with which they are written, are very edifying and exemplary. I wish success to them as much as you can do. But I can tell you of my certain knowledge, that not the least alteration will be made in the ecclesiastical system.”† We are not to form our judgment of the liberality of men’s tempers and principles, from the approbation or opposition of those in power. Warburton, as well as the author of this piece, discovered his firmness in the cause of ecclesiastical reformation, while he reminded his learned friend that the attainment of it was then impracticable.

Not long after the rebellion in 1745, Mr. (afterwards Dr.) Samuel Chandler, a dissenting minister of great reputation and ability, being on a visit to his friends at Norwich, happened to hear bishop Gooch deliver a charge to his clergy, in which he thought his lordship made some uncandid reflections on the dissenters. One expression appeared to him invidious—“That

* Bogue and Bennett, vol. iii. p. 155—169. † Belsham’s George II. p. 166.

the leaders of the rebellion were presbyterians." Mr. Chandler, on his return to London, wrote a letter to the bishop, complaining of his charge, and particularly of that expression. It was written in a very handsome manner, and he received from his lordship a very civil and respectful answer.

When the bishop visited the metropolis, Mr. Chandler, at his desire, waited upon him, when they had much friendly conversation upon the reconciliation of different parties; and among other subjects, they discussed that of a comprehension. This visit was followed, at the bishop's request, by another, when the celebrated bishop Sherlock was present; who soon discovered his shrewdness, but said, "Our church, Mr. Chandler, consists of three parts, doctrine, discipline, and ceremonies. As to the last, they should be left indifferent, as they are agreed on all hands to be. As to the second, our discipline * * * * *. And as to the first, what is your objection?" Mr. Chandler answered, "Your articles, my lord, must be expressed in Scripture words; and the Athanasian creed be discarded." Both the bishops answered, "They wished they were rid of the creed, and had no objection to altering the articles into Scripture words. But what should we do about re-ordination?" To which Mr. Chandler replied, "None of us would renounce his presbyterian ordination; but if their lordships meant only to impose their hands on us, and by that rite recommend us to public service in their society, that perhaps might be submitted to." The two bishops, at the conclusion of the interview, requested Mr. Chandler to wait on archbishop Herring, which he did, and met the bishop of Norwich. The archbishop received him in a very friendly manner; and being informed by his lordship of Norwich, that Mr. Chandler and he had taken into consideration the importance of a comprehension, the archbishop said, "A very good thing: he wished it with all his heart; and the rather, because this was a time which called upon all men to unite against infidelity and immorality, which threatened universal ruin;" and added, "he was encouraged to hope from the piety, learning, and moderation of many dissenters, that this was a proper time to make the attempt."—"But, may it please your grace," said Dr. Gooch, "Mr. Chandler says the articles must be altered into the words of Scripture."—"And why not?" replied the

archbishop. "It is the impertinences of men, thrusting their own words into articles, instead of the words of God, which have occasioned most of the divisions in the Christian church, from the beginning to this day." The archbishop generously added, "that the bench of bishops seemed to be of his mind; and that he should be glad to see Mr. Chandler again; but he was then obliged to go to court."

The good archbishop, according to the intimation of Dr. Warburton, met with very little encouragement at court to persevere in this benevolent design; for, during the remainder of this reign, we hear no more of ecclesiastical reform or comprehension. Some persons were disposed to censure Mr. Chandler for his conduct in this affair, especially for an expression he used at his second visit, when urging the expediency of having the articles in Scripture language, he said, "it was for others, not himself, that he suggested this, his own conscience not being dissatisfied with them as they stood: for he freely owned himself to be a moderate Calvinist."*

Thus ended the affair of the comprehension. The scheme was too chimerical in its nature to afford, under existing circumstances, any rational hope of success; yet the wishes and efforts of both parties, clearly evinced the moderation, liberality, and benevolence of their minds. Upon the failure of this attempt, both parties ought to have cultivated a spirit of peace and charity, and to have united their endeavours, though they could not unite in one communion, to promote the great objects and interests of Christianity.

It would be improper to conclude this part of the narrative, without paying a tribute of respect to the memory of archbishop Herring. The liberality and moderation of the venerable primate was become proverbial. Before his advancement to the primacy, he had been made bishop of Rochester, which see had been most frequently filled by divines far less liberal in their principles; among whom was the famous Dr. Sprat. This circumstance gave rise to the observation, "That the see of Rochester had been more remarkable for *Sprats* than *Herrings*." The archbishop's truly Christian principles added greater lustre to his character than the adventitious honours of the world, and rendered him a bright ornament to the exalted station which he so worthily occupied.

* Wilson, vol. ii. p. 374.

SECTION II.

The Spirit of Religious Liberty.

THE foregoing occurrences contributed greatly to the advancement of Christian freedom. The spirit of religious liberty was more signally conspicuous than at any former period; and the advocates of religious melioration, having time for cool reflection, had their views matured and corrected, founding their claims of freedom upon the undeniable rights of mankind. They had formerly discovered their antipathy against the particular faults and imperfections of the church of England; but during this reign, their entire disapprobation of all coercive establishments of religion fortified their attachment to the only true doctrine of religious liberty. Many of them considering the incorporation of the church with the state, as a certain mark of antichristian usurpation, deemed it idle warfare to contend about her lesser blemishes, but rejected the very foundation on which she stood as illegal and unjust. Their claims of freedom were purified from the most envenomed passion—envy at the more exalted state of the established church. They congratulated themselves on their escape from a slavish subjection to existing spiritual domination, being allowed to present the whole of their religious obedience to Jesus Christ; while they divided their censures, by directing part of them against the presbyterian usurpation of Scotland, as only a few degrees less illiberal and corrupt than the episcopal church of England.

In their reasonings on this subject, they openly declared that the sacred Scriptures, containing the whole will of God, were the only authentic and infallible rule of the Christian's faith and practice, by which all points of religion were to be determined by every private Christian; and that no man or body of men on earth, had the least degree of power or authority to control any private Christian in the use of the sacred volume, in the exercise of his mental powers on points of theology, or in his observance of divine worship. While they

owned the most perfect subjection to the civil power in all civil matters, they could not help considering themselves as perfectly free from the authority of man, and accountable to God alone, in all things pertaining to religion and the worship of God. They accordingly rejected the decrees of councils, synods, convocations, and general assemblies, whether ancient or modern, popish or protestant, episcopal, presbyterian, independent, or methodistic, whether they pretended to absolute infallibility, or the humbler grace of expediency, or any other device of man. In virtue of the obedience and subjection which they owed to "the Shepherd and Bishop of souls," they totally renounced all these authoritative guides and supreme directors in the great affairs of religion and salvation; and they treated all their traditions, canons, decrees, and injunctions, as things unworthy of their attention, and unable to oblige their consciences.

As the word of God was the only infallible rule in matters of religion, and intended equally for the use and benefit of all professing Christians; so they maintained, that every private person was under indispensable obligation from God to search that word, and to regulate his faith and religious practice by it, to the absolute exclusion of human interference. Every man, according to their views, had an unalienable right to judge of the sense and meaning of Scripture, and to follow the convictions of his own understanding and conscience, without the least human control: even an equal right with the bishops and pastors, who, though their office led them to instruct and persuade others, had no right to "lord it over God's heritage," to exercise dominion over men's consciences, or to bind on others the burden of their own decrees or their own interpretations of Scripture. They rejected all such interference, whether popish or protestant, as extremely officious, and a gross violation of one of the dearest rights of mankind—the right of private judgment.

In the further elucidation of their principles, the enlightened patrons of religious freedom, affirmed, that, since every Christian had an unquestionable right to judge for himself, he had an equal right to the peaceable possession of his principles; and so he ought, in all such things, to be left to God and his own conscience; but that he claimed protection from

the civil government, in the full and undisturbed enjoyment of them, though his principles might be ever so contrary to established opinions, the systems of priests, the religion of princes, or the implicit faith of the multitude. Truth, in their opinion, was not any man's exclusive property; but that all Christians were under the strongest obligation in the sight of God to believe and propagate it. Every Christian had an immutable right, and was bound by his Creator, to publish and vindicate his own religious opinions to the widest extent; to separate from those Christian communions and societies, whose doctrine and worship he could not in conscience approve; and to enjoy, without molestation or suffering, the liberty of serving God as he should judge most expedient and useful. They concluded, that unless this liberty were the *inherent right* of every man, in every age and every nation, it could not be the right of any man; therefore, on this account, the publication of Christianity to the world, and the protestation against the corruptions of the church of Rome, ought to be condemned as unwarrantable innovations: Christianity was first propagated under the most violent *opposition* of the civil magistrate, as well as the established superstitions of nations and kingdoms.

They were of opinion, that all persons, of whatever character, dignity, office, or power, who should at any time censure and condemn any other persons merely for difference of opinion in religion, and for following the dictates of conscience; or who should on this account expose them to public hatred; or who should attempt to excite the civil magistrate to deprive them of the natural rights and privileges of worthy subjects; all such persons evidently proved themselves to be destitute of the true spirit of Christianity, oppressors of religious liberty, and persecutors of their brethren. They acted in direct violation of those dignified principles by which alone, the propagation of Christianity and the work of reformation could be defended: they were disturbers of the peace of society, and of the church of God; and, so far as they acted thus, they were under the sovereign dictation of that wisdom which is not from above, but "is earthly, sensual, and devilish." Those who attacked others with scorn and ridicule, on the score of their religion, exhibited not less the spirit of intolerance, than the men who formerly doomed heretics to the stake.

The advocates of complete religious freedom carried their reasoning still farther. They considered the grand basis of the reformation, and the support of the great cause of protestants, to be the right of private judgment. On this fundamental point they reasoned, that if this right were only a pretended or usurped right, all successive protests against the impositions and superstitions of Rome, were insolent and schismatical : but, on the contrary, if this right were a sacred prerogative with which God had invested mankind ; if it were essential to our nature as rational men, and to our honour and privilege as Christians ; then those protests appeared to have been the noble struggles of oppressed and almost expiring liberty ; the generous attempts to restore true religion, awfully prostituted and debased, to its primitive lustre and dignity ; and a brave opposition to the encroachments of arbitrary power, which, through priestly avarice and ambition, had so long enslaved the bodies and oppressed the souls of the Christian world. The character of the first protestants, considered in this view, appeared to be that of undaunted heroes in the cause of Christ, and distinguished benefactors to mankind ; while their successors, maintaining the same principles, and being governed by the same sentiments, would not only share in their celebrity, but be esteemed the undisguised patrons of religion, the friends of civil society, and guardians of the most important and valuable interests of mankind.

The name of *protestant* will ever be a name of honour, or infamy, according as this one point is adjusted. It will be necessary, therefore, to inquire into the foundation of the right they claimed of choosing their own religion, even when it was against the opinion of the multitude, the decrees of the church, and the enactments of the civil magistrate. Since they disclaimed all human jurisdiction over conscience, all human authoritative standards of orthodoxy, and all blind attachment to sectarian distinctions, they considered themselves obliged, in justice, to declare publicly, that they could not engage in the defence of the reformed doctrine, unless it had been confirmed by the concurring testimony of reason and Scripture. They, therefore, renounced all methods of imposition, violence, and persecution, not merely because they were popish, but because they were unnatural, inhuman, and antichristian ; and

they pleaded for the right of private judgment, not only as the claim of protestants, but as one of those sacred and original rights of human nature, which was revived and re-established by the publication of the Gospel.

These patrons of benevolence and social happiness, considered man, by his original constitution, a moral and accountable creature. Hence, they said, that the rights of conscience were sacred and equal in all; that as every man was accountable for himself, he had an immutable right to judge and determine for himself; and that his religion or irreligion, his virtue or vice, depended entirely on his own choice, and not in the least on the choice of others. In matters, therefore, relating purely to religion and the conscience, without affecting the peace and welfare of civil society, they concluded, that every man ought to be left entirely free and unmolested. This seemed to be the plain dictate and law of nature. To suppose, that, in a point of such vast importance, man had no choice; that he was to speak the sense and impositions of others; and that he was to be guided and played upon as a mere animated machine, void of intelligence and incapable of moral government, appeared to them the manifest contradiction of his very frame, and of the very design of his creation. The careful examination and unbiased choice of religion seemed, in their opinion, one chief end for the attainment of which men were endued with rational intellect. Had the Creator intended, that the bulk of mankind should have submitted implicitly to a certain set of established opinions, or to human legislation in religion, the human intellect must, excepting to the compilers and conductors of the public faith, have been in a great degree impertinent and useless.

On these substantial grounds, the patrons of religious liberty asserted and claimed the right of private judgment, as the indubitable right of mankind. In their opinion, it so directly results from our very constitution, and is so inseparably connected with our rational nature, that the one can not be abrogated or molested, without destroying or offering violence to the other. A man may alienate his estate or his worldly property, and surrender his right in them to others; but he cannot transfer the rights of conscience, until he can efface his rational and moral faculties, and obtain a substitute to be

judged for him at the righteous tribunal of God. They concluded, that a devout and unbiased examination of religious truth, was absolutely essential to the Christian's faith and practice; for, in their opinion, true faith and virtuous practice could no more exist, without convincing evidence, than they could without ideas. No religion can be fit for rational beings, but that which results from examination, conviction, and approbation. The religion of bigots is a species of idolatry;—a blind devotion paid to the customs and traditions of men;—an abject despicable slavery;—consequently, a reproach and scandal to human nature. They could not call such partiality and fanaticism, by the name of religion, without adopting the most effectual method to render religion itself contemptible.

They accounted impositions in religion as a kind of spiritual sorcery, or a species of magic to make men Christians, and send them to heaven without Christian faith or holiness. This appeared to them to be a device most dangerous in its consequence, destructive of civil order, prejudicial to the welfare of society, and infinitely injurious and disgraceful to Christianity.

These bold heroes for the rights and best interests of mankind, in perfect consistency to their principles, openly defended the liberty of the press, as one of the strongest barriers of the liberty of Christian churches. It is this, said they, which ascertains the proper boundaries of power, fixes the just measure of subjection, exposes slavish opinions, and detects the groundless and arrogant presumption of those, who claim dominion over conscience. It is the means of unveiling, and discovering to public view, the most artful schemes of despotism; and lets the body of the people, who are naturally too indolent and secure, into the most secret and crafty designs which are formed for undermining their liberties, and making them eternal slaves. This discovery will not fail to excite in them a noble spirit of self-defence, while it frequently checks the insolence of spiritual tyrants, by striking terror into their hearts. The truth of these observations is undeniably confirmed by the history of our country. The vast importance of this branch of liberty, and its inseparable connexion with all others, is derived from innumerable historical facts, collected from the unworthy actions of aspiring ecclesiastics and corrupt ministers

of state, who have always been its bitterest enemies: well knowing, that if the people can be bound in chains of darkness, being unconscious of danger, they will the more readily fall down and worship their golden image, or swallow the absurd doctrines of indefeasible hereditary right, and unlimited passive obedience.

The liberty of the press appeared to them one of the most effectual methods of propagating and preserving truth; which could never suffer from the most potent opposition, unless it were defended by weak or unskilful persons. On the contrary, they believed that the more truth was debated, the more it would prevail and triumph: the more thoroughly it was examined, the more strong and decisive would its evidence, its excellence, and its authority appear. Objections against it would be disarmed of all their force; every one of its proofs would be more fully illustrated and confirmed; and after it had stood the severest trials, a foundation would be laid of embracing it more firmly, and, consequently, of feeling its powerful influence. In their opinion it was the property of error *alone* to shun the light, and to seek shelter under implicit faith or human impositions: but to have affirmed that truth needed any such subterfuges, would have debased its excellency, and libelled its author.

On the principles of unrestricted liberty, it was asked, whether pestilential and damnable heresies—the wild and monstrous opinions, prejudicial to morality and religion, were not vented and propagated from the press? All this was granted. And was not the press open for the only proper antidotes against such poison? Was it not as open for refuting, as for broaching such heresies?—for showing the infamy and malignity of such extravagant and pernicious principles? Was it not impossible for the arm of power to refute and suppress these obnoxious opinions, so long as men claimed the power of thinking and believing for themselves? And was not this an easy task for the pens of the judicious and the learned, who have always abounded among us? Of what then should they be afraid? It was said, that, though all this were true, it often happened that some persons were infected by the contagion of these fatal errors and heresies. To which it was replied, that this was only an accidental abuse, to which the best things in

the world were constantly liable. Was not reason abused? Were not the holy Scriptures abused? Had not the priesthood; had not kingly power; had not all human governments been as wickedly and shamefully abused, as ever was the liberty of the press? Was reason, therefore, to be no more consulted? Were the Scriptures not to be used? Were priests not to be tolerated? Were they to live without kings, or any form of civil government? Such violent remedies are always found worse than the disease. It was justly argued that the liberty of the press did not naturally and directly produce these evils; but that its genuine and immediate tendency was to banish error, heresy, and imposture of all kinds, and to establish, upon an immoveable basis, the empire of truth without a rival. Whereas, if this branch of liberty had been destroyed, or arbitrarily restrained, error would have remained for ever seated on its throne of darkness, without even the least dawn of reformation; while truth would have been confined in chains, and not suffered to go abroad for the benefit of mankind.*

These undisguised sentiments were openly defended by the zealous advocates of liberty of conscience, and brought to the test in their controversy with Woolston, the deist. Having attacked him with the only weapons which they deemed lawful in such warfare, when they observed certain churchmen shake the sword over his head, and threaten him with civil penalties, they protested against such methods, which would, in their view, have snatched the honours of victory from Christian truth. The celebrated Lardner published "A Vindication of our blessed Saviour's Miracles," in answer to Woolston, and embraced this opportunity of protesting against the prosecution, by which the infidel, for the propagation of his opinions, was condemned to one year's imprisonment, and a fine of one hundred pounds. Lardner observed in his preface, that if men were permitted to deliver their sentiments freely on all religious subjects, and to propose their objections even against Christianity, there was no reason to be in pain for the event. "On the side of Christianity," said he, "I expect to see, as hitherto, the greatest share of learning, good sense, true wit, and fairness of disputation; which things, I hope, will be su-

* Old Whig, vol. ii. p. 224.

perior to low ridicule, false argument, and misrepresentation." He proved with irresistible evidence, that all force on the minds of men in matters of religious belief, was directly contrary to religion, and pernicious to the cause which it was intended to serve. Dr. Waddington, bishop of Chichester, expostulated with Lardner concerning these sentiments: but after the interchange of a few letters, his lordship seemed to concede the principle in debate.

Mr. Simon Brown, a champion for religious liberty, wrote against Woolston, "A fit Rebuke for a ludicrous Infidel," with a preface concerning the prosecution of such writers by the civil power. This preface was a noble apology for liberty of conscience, and of the press, and a just censure of civil prosecutions for matters of opinion. The learned and excellent Dr. Doddridge at the same time published a sermon on "The Absurdity and Iniquity of Persecution for Conscience's sake, in all its forms and degrees." It was recommended to the public in a short preface by Mr. Some, as the best he had ever seen on the subject, in so narrow a compass. "The case of persecution," said he, "is so clearly stated, the absurdity and iniquity of it so fully exposed, and the reasons advanced in its defence are so well answered, that, I am willing to believe, it will give satisfaction to all impartial and candid readers." Dr. Kippis pronounced it, "an elaborate and excellent discourse, displaying with great energy and elegance, the grand principles of toleration and religious liberty."*

The quakers had been protected by the government in the exercise of their religious freedom, in common with other protestant dissenters; and, especially, they had obtained relief from the legislature in several important cases which particularly concerned them as a body of people.† Being, therefore, encouraged by the success of former applications, and confident of the liberal views of the king, they made, in the year 1735, a grand, but unsuccessful effort to obtain legislative relief from certain modes of prosecution which they still endured. The first of king William by which their affirmation was admitted instead of an oath, contained a clause which pointed out a shorter and less expensive method of recovering small

* Biog. Britan. vol. v. p. 284.

† Extracts, p. 17.

sums for tithes and church-rates. Yet, as the act did not prohibit the clergy from applying to the more oppressive prosecutions in the exchequer and ecclesiastical courts, too many were unhappily disposed to adopt the mode which put the quakers to the greatest trouble and expense. The friends, therefore, drew up a statement of their case, and a petition, which they presented to the parliament. They showed that above eleven hundred of their body had been prosecuted in the exchequer and spiritual courts; that nearly three hundred of them had been committed to prison; that several had died in their confinement; and that above eight hundred pounds had been taken from ten persons, where the original demands upon them all did not amount to fifteen pounds.

In compliance with their petition, a bill was brought into the house of commons, not to take from the clergy any thing which belonged to them, but to compel them to resort to less expensive modes of recovering what they considered their due. "The clergy," says our historian, "now mustered all their strength against the bill for the relief of the friends, whereby they manifested themselves no less eager to hold fast the power of oppression which the law had left them in the recovery of tithes, than the tithe itself."* On this subject were published three anonymous pamphlets, which were all attributed to the bishops. Dr. Edmund Gibson, bishop of London, who, for his *codex juris ecclesiastici*, was considered the champion of the clergy, wrote, as is supposed, the most able piece, entitled, "The country Parson's Plea against the Quaker's Bill for Tithes." It was answered by one who styled himself a member of the house of commons, but was found afterwards to be lord Harvey. As the bishop admitted that no wise or good clergyman would adopt any other method than that prescribed by the intended bill, lord Harvey argued, that, if the wisest and best would use it of choice, the unreasonable and unjust should be forced to use it by necessity; for it would be a miserable case to have no better security against oppression than the wisdom and goodness of the clergy.

In addition to the pamphlets, circular letters were addressed from the bishops to the clergy throughout most parts of En-

* Gough, vol. iv. p. 283.

gland and Wales, which produced numerous petitions from them against the bill. Lord Harvey's answer to the country Parson contended, that the bill ought to have passed, if it were only to have proved, that it ought not to be in the power of a mitred doctor, by his letters missive stirring petitions from every diocese, to intimidate the house of commons in a matter of such high concern to the justice of the kingdom. "I hope," said he, "a body of Englishmen will never weigh petitions in *quantity* against any bill whatever, especially bills for the reformation of the church, against which they are certain of having as many remonstrances as there are deaneries, archdeaconries, chapters, colleges, or ecclesiastical precincts in England and Wales." Counsel was heard in behalf of the petitioners against the bill, and several alterations were proposed, when, after a vigorous resistance, the bill passed the house of commons.

The opposition was renewed with additional eagerness among the peers. Petitions were presented, and counsel was employed against the act, but the friends of the measure took care that counsel should be heard also in its favour. The grievances of the quakers appearing too evident to be denied, and too serious to be slighted, the adversaries of toleration affected to consider the bill, upon coming from the commons, as incorrect, and unfit to pass into a law; and by this shameful artifice, they succeeded in throwing it out. In the disgraceful majority, were fifteen bishops; and two of these, my lords of London and Sarum, having exerted themselves so vigorously against the proposed relief of the quakers, received the public thanks of the clergy, "for their care and vigilance, in maintaining the constitution of the church of England in its present happy establishment, and the legal rights of the clergy against the late strange infringements upon them!" When it is remembered that the quakers were not so bold as to apply for exemption from the pressures of tithes, but asked only for an act which would prevent unreasonable and malicious men from recurring to those methods of obtaining their demands which were ruinous to the friends, it seems that those clergymen, who testified so much gratefulness to the bishops, esteemed the power of conducting oppressive and persecuting lawsuits, as one of the "just rights of the church!"*

* Gough, vol. iv. p. 287.

The failure of this measure produced, between the clergy and the quakers, a long controversy, which was maintained with great asperity; the clergy asserting, that their opponents had falsely aspersed them, without being able to make good their accusations of litigious and oppressive suits; while the friends maintained, that their persecutors were fully convicted of conduct which would expose any men, but especially the ministers of religion, to universal contempt. Lord Harvey affirmed that such facts were substantiated, as would be a just reason for the abolition of tithes altogether, if suits for them could not be carried on by more humane methods.

The university of Oxford discovered a disposition extremely unfavourable to religious melioration. Its very statutes were intolerant and oppressive, disallowing the right of private judgment, to every youth sent there for education. This was particularly exemplified in the statute relating to subscription to the articles of religion, and certain oaths, which every one at the age of sixteen was peremptorily required to observe upon his admittance into that university, as prescribed in these words:

“ All students and scholars of whatsoever condition, shall, within a fortnight after their coming to the university, offer themselves to the chancellor, or his commissary, to be matriculated; nor shall they before matriculation enjoy any of the privileges or benefits of the university. If they shall neglect or delay to offer themselves to be matriculated, after having been duly admonished thereof by the head of their college or his deputy, they shall, for every fortnight of such delay, forfeit the sum of *six shillings and eight pence*, to the use of the university. And all persons coming to be matriculated, if of the age of sixteen years, shall subscribe the articles of faith and religion, shall take the oath of supremacy, together with an oath of fidelity to the university, in like manner as hath heretofore been accustomed. But if they are under the age of sixteen and above twelve, they shall then be matriculated upon only subscribing the articles of faith and religion. And as for such as shall be under the age of twelve, they shall be matriculated without subscribing or taking any of the aforesaid oaths; provided always that all such persons, when they shall arrive at the respective ages at which the abovementioned are to be performed, shall then perform the same; or, for neglect

thereof, shall be subject to such penalties as if they had never offered themselves to be matriculated."

My author, in his comments on this statute, affirms, that it was a most preposterous method of proceeding, to take up and hamper a poor child thus, as soon as he entered the university. Whenever or by whomsoever this statute was introduced, sure I am, that it is high time it should be taken away, at least until some one will show any use it can be of, which will not end in tyranny and slavery. Is it because these articles are so excellent? so conformable to Scripture? Be it so. Still we ask, why are they to be *imposed*? And why upon such tender youths? If they are, indeed, so excellent, will they not approve themselves to the understandings of gentlemen as they grow up, but they must be crammed down their throats, and bound upon them by the most solemn ties, at a time when they scarcely know their right hand from their left? Does it not look as if the imposers of these articles greatly suspected their truth and excellency, when they use such preposterous methods to engage people's belief? Are they not afraid, lest, as men grow older, they should grow wiser; and, as they grow wiser, they should begin to doubt the truth of these articles? If not, why all this haste for subscription before a boy can eat his commons, or be permitted to read Aristotle? Why are young gentlemen bound to subscribe, that which, perhaps, after a few months' study they may find good reason to retract?

Let us have done trifling, says he, with one another. Let us sacrifice all the little notions of party, and our fondness for creeds and confessions, to the love of truth, and the liberty of Christians. If we aim at truth, all dark ways should be avoided. Truth and daylight go together. I love a free, open, and impartial examination, not only for myself, but for others: no man will surely be glad to have his own eyes put out, or those of other men. I hate tyranny under all its shapes and pretences; and because I would not willingly be tyrannized over myself, I do not wish to tyrannize over other people; but I would follow our Saviour's rule: "Do to others as you wish others to do to you."

Liberty is a subject never to be exhausted. It is the hard fate of the Christian world, that the pride, insolence, and tyranny of a small part of it, have made it necessary to say so

much in elucidation of this doctrine. "I will conclude with this motion, that you would embrace an opportunity to move for a bill for utterly repealing and abolishing this dictatorial, oppressive statute. I dare say, that every gentleman who has the honour to sit in parliament, will be glad to contribute towards taking this yoke from off the necks of British youth; a yoke which our fathers have borne, but which, I trust, our children shall not wear. Those gentlemen will be sensible of the indignity put upon their sons, when, sent to Oxford for education, the first step that is taken is to put chains upon them; not indeed upon their bodies, but upon their understandings. This is to give them stones, when they ask bread."*

While these heavy complaints were made against the hard terms of obtaining a college education, the controversy about imposing ecclesiastical subscription was revived with great spirit, and carried on for a considerable time, especially by the dignitaries and clergy of the established church. Archdeacon Blackburne employed his learned pen on this occasion, and published several excellent pieces, pleading with great force the exercise of lenity and moderation. His "Remarks" on the subscription to the articles and liturgy, he dedicated to the students of both universities, who were training for the ministry of the church, in which he thus nobly pleads the cause of a further reformation, and the allowance of greater Christian liberty:

"I apprehend that such of you as have the best capacities of understanding, and the deepest impressions of religion on your minds, will, upon a serious and impartial examination of this important case, find the greatest reluctance in yourselves to comply with these terms of ministerial conformity: at the same time, you are, of all others, the best qualified to promote the true interests of religion, and to do the most substantial service to the community as teachers of religion. As all other methods of relief have failed, and all other practicable applications for it have become vain and hopeless, if such of you as cannot satisfy yourselves of the scriptural rectitude of the conditions required for admission into the church, should declare for some other profession, while you have time to look before

* Old Whig, vol. i. p. 400.

you, and give this want of satisfaction as the reason of such declaration ; I am persuaded our superiors would not be inattentive to the effect such a loss would have upon the church, and might very probably be prevailed upon, by that consideration, to provide a remedy for it—that very remedy which so many good men have been so long pleading and sighing for in vain.

“ A large majority of the clergy, either really are or affect to be persuaded, that no alterations in the constitution of our church are at all necessary. At the head of these are some of the most opulent and dignified of the order. Vigorous opposition from these is certain and formidable, and sufficient to intimidate the few in comparison, who are affected with a different sense of their situation. It is true, indeed, the reasons for this persuasion, most of those who avow it have the prudence either to keep to themselves, or to retail only in private conversation. They are probably such reasons as will not bear the light ; and they may know of some methods of keeping things tight, without giving any reasons.

“ The clergy who dissent from this majority are dispersed and distributed in different and distant parts of the kingdom, little acquainted with each other, and in no circumstances to unite in a common application. They are, for the most part, men of small preferments, and some of large families : men who think their personal care of, and attendance upon, their respective parishes, the principal end of their ministry, and a leading circumstance in their future conduct. The rest are men of study, retirement, modesty, and moderation, little versed in the intrigues of the world ; and who no otherwise know how far their conscientious brethren are like-minded, but by some occasional and nameless publications ; which, though they fall in with their own private sentiments, give them no satisfaction how much farther the authors of them would go than bearing their testimony from the press.

“ Many of these worthy persons have been reminded by their orthodox brethren, of a fulminating canon, the seventy-third in our present collection, which ordains and constitutes, ‘ that no priests or ministers of the word of God, nor any other persons, shall meet together in any private house or elsewhere, to consult upon any matter or course to be taken by them, or, upon their motion or direction, by any other, which may any

way tend to the impeaching or depraving of the doctrine of the the church of England, or of the Book of Common-prayer, or of any part of the government and discipline now established in the church of England, under pain of excommunication *ipso facto*.' How difficult it would be to assemble a number of men, considerable enough to give weight to a petition to the legislature for reformation, while this rod of correction is thus stuck up in their view, time, and a little more acquaintance with the world, will convince you.

“ So far, indeed, as this canon relates to other persons, not of the clergy, there is little reason to stand in awe of its operation. They who have taken out the canonical sting with respect to the laity, have done it by such arguments as leave it in its full force of authority and animadversion upon the clergy. Though we used to hear large and florid encomiums on the moderation in the present age ; yet whenever I find an orthodox brother propping up a tottering argument by citing a *canon*, I cannot forbear suspecting he would execute that canon upon me, if he were not restrained by something which is not of an ecclesiastical complexion.

“ There are among these some who think, that, with respect to their ministerial calling, there is an obligation upon them to the supreme Lord of the harvest, prior to all stipulations with any particular church. They consider themselves as called to, and placed in, their several stations by the providence of God. They were admitted to those stations, without any consciousness on their part, of any thing wrong in the conditions required of them, and with the sincerest intentions of fulfilling their ministry according to the Gospel of Christ. Since they have found their mistake, they think their Christian liberty allows them to act accordingly, and so does the church, if she be consistent with herself. They, therefore, comply with the church's forms where they can, and where they cannot, they deviate from them. This they do without disguise, and are ready to give a reason for their conduct to all who have a right to demand it. If their own people have any objections to them or their ministry on this account, the law is open, and they may implead such pastors before their respective diocesans. Should their lordships disallow of the practice, these ministers are ready to submit, and to retire without the trouble of a formal

process. But they can by no means be prevailed with, voluntarily to disable themselves from doing the little good in their power, of which perhaps no other means are afforded, but in this particular province. They think their covenant with God, as his ministers, precludes them from dismissing themselves from his service. In the mean time, they are contented with their lot, and some of them with very slender provisions in the church, but *would not repeat their subscriptions to gain the whole world !*”*

Dr. Chandler, already mentioned, took part in this great controversy, and published his “Case of Subscription to explanatory Articles of Faith,” on which occasion he thus discovered the mildness of his principles, and the amiable spirit of religious liberty :

“Proper authority, I hope, I shall never oppose ; but in matters of religion I own no human authority to be proper, and will not bend to the greatest. It is my honour as a Christian, that in these things I submit only to the most high God : In this noble and virtuous pride I am established. Him only I call and reverence as the Father of my faith. I have only one Lord, even Christ. I acknowledge no divinely authorized and inspired teachers but the apostles ; nor will I yield my conscience or judgment to be determined by the dictates of any mortal upon earth. The Scriptures I receive as a divine revelation ; by which I humbly endeavour to form my own sentiments of Christianity, and by these, and no other, will I ever examine those who apply to me for assistance, on entering the work of the ministry. All who receive these as the rule of their faith, and live by them as the rule of their morals, I own so far as the sound members of Christ’s body : I embrace them as my brethren : I will gladly communicate with them ; and will never debar them from my communion. I will, if other qualifications are not wanting, willingly receive them into the ministry. I hope to die in full fellowship with them ; and to be happy with them as my companions in a better state. This I declare without exception of any one denomination or party of Christians, whatever be their external disadvantages, or the opprobrious names given them.

“ Hard names and party reproaches do not terrify me at all. Without this latitude of principle, I can see no possible end to the divisions of the church ; and if I should mark or avoid any Christians, who thus adhere to the only rule of Christianity, I transgress the apostolic canon, and am chargeable with a schismatical and unchristian spirit.

“ I can never reflect, without the utmost concern, that the doctrine of Christ, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy ; that breathes universal benevolence ; that teaches us to love and pray for our enemies ; that makes charity the essential mark of his disciples ; that forbids us to receive one another to doubtful disputations ; that commands the strong to bear with the weak, and, if it be possible, to live peaceably with all men ; should yet be made a continual bone of contention among Christians, and become the occasion, through the weakness of some good men, and the wickedness of other designing ones, of that furious zeal, those endless quarrels, and mortal enmities, of which sober heathens would be ashamed. I will, therefore, by the help of God, never cherish, on any account, this bad disposition in myself, nor encourage it in others : and if in my extensive charity, I should happen to err, it is an error I doubt not that he will pardon, who is the God of love, and dwells in love.

“ If upon comparison it should be found, that the church of England is less arbitrary and severe than the protestant church of France, this will not prove that the severities of subscription which she still maintains, are at all justifiable ; or that the imposing power which she yet assumes and exercises, is agreeable to the evangelical nature and constitution of Christianity. If her articles may be subscribed with less difficulty than those of that reformed church, it is greatly to the commendation of the church of England ; but the nobler commendation would be to take away *all difficulty*. Without this, one thing will ever be wanting to her perfection. Oh ! that she were in all respects without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.

“ The French reformed church is laid in ruins, by that very imposing power which she herself too rigorously exerted. The church of England still subsists ; and I most sincerely pray,

that the good providence of God may ever protect her, and that none of the blemishes of that sister protestant church may be ever found in her. Rather let her excel in moderation, benevolence, charity, tenderness to the consciences of men, desire of peace, and love of liberty. Let her, as becomes an affectionate mother, remove those subscriptions which create any difficulties to good men, and admit her ministers and members upon the terms laid down by Christ and his apostles; and I could venture to foretel, that in a few years all would flow into her bosom, and gladly unite in her communion.

“As her internal constitution and discipline now stand, she hath it in her power, let me say it without offence, to put on a sternness and severity, not at all agreeable to the gentle, benign, and forbearing disposition which ought to prevail, and be the distinguishing characteristic of every Christian church. The growing moderation and Christian forbearance of her prelates and clergy, and the lenity and indulgence of the civil government, I acknowledge with pleasure, and for which I bless God: but her penal laws are still in force against all who do not subscribe as appointed; and the dissenters experimentally know, by the vexations of some of their ministers, how these laws would operate, had certain warm and interested gentlemen power to act agreeably to their discovered inclinations, or if the full execution of them was put entirely into their hands.

“As to those who differ from the church of England, and cry out against her subscriptions as arbitrary, they do this, not only because they apprehend them to be encroachments upon the rights and privileges of Englishmen, but encroachments upon that liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free, and in which an inspired apostle hath commanded them to stand fast, exhorting them not to be entangled with any human yoke of bondage. They indeed think, that making conformity to external forms of worship a necessary qualification for enjoying the common rights of subjects, is not quite consistent with the liberties and privileges of Englishmen; and that this hath been so substantially proved by one who adorns one of the highest stations in the established church, as never will be disproved to the end of the world. When they speak or write upon the imposition of subscription to human

explanatory articles of faith, they consider it as peculiarly injurious to the rights of conscience, as an encroachment on the supreme authority of Christ, as casting a severe reflection on the perfection of Scripture, and as the exercise of a power, which must, in the general nature of things, be destructive of the peace of the church, and of the purity both of Christian doctrine and worship.

“ The church of England may preserve and strengthen her own constitution, by suffering no foreign churches to exceed her in gentleness, a healing spirit, condescension to the weaknesses of others, and encouraging among her clergy and flocks a due regard to the authority of the sacred writings, by which alone she can defend her separation from the church of Rome. She may remove some of her enclosures without removing or shaking any of her foundations, or endangering her safety. She may take away the *wall of partition* between herself and other protestants, without weakening any of her real securities. She may open her bosom to receive into her communion and ministry, all who are willing to enter upon the terms prescribed by Christ, without lessening her privileges. In a word, she may easily increase the number of her friends, without creating herself a single enemy, by only altering some things which are really alterable and exceptionable; and wholly taking away a few others, which, in the judgment of many in the church of England, expose her to the censure of her avowed enemies, are inconsistent with the principles of true protestantism, and greatly prejudicial to the interest of true religion.”*

These extracts contain the affectionate breathings of a generous soul, and discover the amiable spirit of unlimited Christian freedom. Nothing, however, was effectually done for relief on the point of clerical subscription, which remains unaltered at this day. In the year 1736, a motion was made in the house of commons for the repeal of those clauses in the test act, which excluded protestant dissenters from civil employments; but the attempt failed. The king was favourable to the design; but his ministers durst not countenance the measure, lest, to the popular odium which taxation had excited, they should have added the inflammatory cry of danger to

* Chandler on Subscription, p. 39, 147, 178.

the church. A repetition of the attempt in the next session of parliament was attended, as every judicious person anticipated, with a similar failure.

The king and his ministers being decidedly favourable to liberty, attempted to accomplish an object founded in justice and humanity, by causing a bill to be introduced into the house of commons for the naturalization of the Jews. The court ministers affirmed that such a law would greatly contribute to the benefit of the nation ; that it would increase the commerce, the credit, and the wealth of the kingdom ; and would be a worthy example of universal toleration. The bill did not pass without much opposition. It was observed by the opposition, that this bill showed greater favour to the Jews, than were shown to certain sects professing Christianity ; that an introduction of that obnoxious people into the kingdom would degrade the character of the nation, and repress the zeal of Christians for their own religion, which was already too much abated. The bill surmounted this opposition, and passed into a law ; but it excited so much jealousy and dissatisfaction in the minds of the people, that it was thought expedient to repeal it in the ensuing session.*

Although these were retrograde movements, so much mildness and good sense prevailed in the senate, that the laws against conjuration and witchcraft were abolished, which had, for ages, exposed the miserable objects of suspicion to the most brutal treatment, for crimes of which no legal proof could be furnished.

That which most alarmed the friends of liberty, but which, in the end, most contributed to establish the triumph of freedom, was the rebellion in 1745. The exiled Stuarts who had ever been the dupes of catholic princes, were again thrown upon our shores, with a view to divert our attention, and procure a division in favour of the enemy. The young pretender, as he was called, landed in Scotland at a time when there were no hopes of shaking the throne of his rival ; and, with all the silly fondness for royal pomp, which characterized his family, wasted his precious moments of unexpected prosperity in proclaiming his father, and disposing of seats in the paradise

* Clarke, vol. iii. p. 134.

which he had not yet regained. Having, in the battle of Preston Pans, beaten the British force which was sent against them, the rebel army marched into England, and, by an unaccountable coincidence of circumstances, arrived within a hundred miles of London, which was thrown into the utmost confusion.

The civil and religious liberties of our country being thus in jeopardy, it was natural for the government to look round with the keen eye of jealousy, to see which way stood the hearts of the people. The resistance of the rebellion required all the ardour and energy of the friends of liberty ; and they acted the part of Christian patriots, according to their avowed principles, in the defence of their country, and their liberties. The dissenters were agitated with an undescribable solicitude for the safety of the tolerant throne of Brunswick, and the preservation of that liberal constitution, under which they, for upwards of half a century, had enjoyed those blessings which ought to be classed among those which are the dearest to immortal beings. The sermons of the pastors, and the prayers and exertions of the churches in the great cause, spoke in strong language the lively interest which they felt in the mighty contest. After the storm was dispelled by the signal defeat of the rebels, the dissenters were elevated to high esteem by the government, and ranked among the best and most valuable of his majesty's subjects.

The rebellion being suppressed, the latter part of his majesty's reign was marked with that internal tranquillity which his paternal administration secured, and that national superiority which is natural to a free and united people ; but, surrounded with these great public blessings, George the Second died October 25, 1760, in the thirty-fourth year of his reign, aged seventy-seven years. He trod in the best steps of his father, and with fidelity, equalled only by his prudence, maintained the principles which seated his illustrious family on the throne. Our country enjoyed, for the first time, two successive monarchs, who, superior to the bigotry and tyranny of any dominant sect, defended with a firm and steady hand, the religious privileges of all their subjects. George the Second constantly aimed at restoring to all his subjects, those rights of which he was convinced many of them were unjustly depriv-

ed ; but he found himself constantly thwarted by the gothic prejudices of those who would have exalted the prince's will into law, except when he wished to do justice to others at the expense of their monopoly.*

The state of religion under this prince was considerably improved. The established church furnished a number of bright ornaments ; yet her religious character was in general at a low ebb. Among the various orders of the clergy, there was a great deficiency of evangelical principle, and of zeal and energy in the exercises of public worship. Instead of the grand fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, the people were generally served from the pulpit with dry morality, which was presented to them in the tone of a cold and uninteresting address : the natural and invariable consequences were manifest in the general languor, formality, and indifference about religion.

Among the various denominations of protestant dissenters, things wore a much more pleasing aspect, and genuine religion progressively increased. Being shielded by so amiable a prince, their religion and their liberality kept pace with each other, and were equally diffused throughout the kingdom. Under the laws of toleration and the mild auspices of the government, they erected places of worship, and raised numerous congregations, both in town and country, many of which were large and respectable, being strongly imbued with the spirit of humble piety. The rise of the methodists greatly contributed to the revival of religion, not only by their own zealous and laborious efforts, but by rousing both churchmen and old dissenters from their spiritual stupor, and awakening the various classes to emulation and devotion.

* Bogue and Bennett, vol. iii. p. 177.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REIGN OF KING GEORGE III.

SECTION I.

Obstructions to the Progress of Religious Liberty.

OUR late revered sovereign, GEORGE the Third, whose father had been dead some years, was placed on the throne at the demise of his grandfather. The pious monarch, endowed with numerous private virtues, was the favourite of the people. On his accession, all ranks of men ardently testified their satisfaction; and all denominations rejoiced that they were to be governed by a sovereign, apparently free from party prejudice.* The amiable and tolerant character of the prince, and the high estimation in which he was held, were circumstances peculiarly favourable to his accession and government.

During the last two reigns, a most gratifying scene was presented; religious freedom advancing with uniform steps, and taking under her protection not only the original dissenters, but the two tribes of methodists, though some were scarcely willing to claim her assistance. In the last period of this history, now brought under review, the prospect is somewhat more varied, but is on the whole particularly encouraging. By the superintending care of divine Providence, the way was safe; religious liberty maintained her honourable station, and asserted her native rights. Those who discovered their unshaken attachment to the great cause of religious melioration, and expressed their joy at the downfall of spiritual despotism,

* Clarke, vol. iii. p. 210.

were indeed held up as disaffected to the government ; but time cleared their character, and confounded their enemies. The history of our country affords substantial proof that the patrons of Christian freedom have been the greatest friends and the firmest supporters of our civil constitution ; and that ever since the expulsion of the Stuarts, they have both merited and enjoyed the personal favour of each succeeding prince. It must be a circumstance extremely galling to those, who, under the dominion of bigotry and intolerance, are constantly representing them as enemies to the government of their country, to recollect that our late beloved monarch not only afforded them the shield of royal protection, but showed, on numerous occasions, a marked attention to their interests, as closely connected with the safety of the state, the welfare of the nation, and the prosperity of the church of God.

It must be acknowledged, that, during this long and eventful reign, the patrons and advocates of religious freedom did not retain that high degree of favour with certain courtiers, which they had previously enjoyed from the accession of the house of Hanover. They had been treated with the highest confidence, as cordial and unshaken friends ; but were afterwards viewed by certain members of the administration with jealousy and suspicion, if not with some degree of aversion and disgust. To this unfavourable change various causes successively contributed, which, together with their influence on the public mind, it will be proper to lay before the reader.

Time, which often produces what reason and argument could not effect, had made a considerable alteration in the established clergy. From the era of the revolution, many of them, disaffected to the reigning prince, cherished in their bosoms the exiled Stuarts as the legitimate claimants of the English throne. But seeing no prospect of their restoration, they began to despair of ever obtaining their wishes ; and a new generation rising up to the priesthood, of similar political principles, but less attached to the particular object of their loyalty, shook off the Stuarts about the close of the former and the beginning of this reign, becoming passionately enamoured with king George the Third, and the existing government. So great an accession of strength was of high importance ; and being received with open arms, they shared liberally in the favours of the court, and in the dignities and emoluments of the church.

Into this new situation, they brought with them the former lofty notions. Like their predecessors, they entertained exalted ideas of the powers and prerogatives of princes, and an aversion against all who were without the pale of the establishment, upon whom, it is painful to add, they bestowed the title of "schismatics and fanatics," stigmatizing them *ememies* both to church and state. These delusive misrepresentations, to which the moderate dignitaries of the two former reigns were entire strangers, began to echo from the pulpits, and to be insinuated into the ears of courtiers. Had their illiberal and erroneous doctrine been treated according to its deserts, no ill effects would have followed : their doctrine would have sunk into degradation and oblivion, and its baneful influence been prevented. But that a doctrine so palatable to fallen nature, should be received with pleasure, and its advocates be cherished as faithful and good friends, was exceedingly natural. How few are there in possession of power, who do not wish for more ! or who do not admire and applaud the prophets who bring them tidings from heaven that it is their right, and who denounce their censures on those that would contract its limits ! On account of the broad and liberal basis on which the dissenters rested their toleration, these new court favourites threw out their insinuations, that they were republicans in their principles, enemies to kings, subverters of the government, and determined foes to the established bishops and clergy, the great and firm pillars of the monarchy. This doctrine being blended with the former, rendered it more soothing and agreeable ; the dissenters being no longer needed for the support of the throne, sunk into some disesteem ; and, this delusion gaining ground, they were even suspected of evil designs against the government of their country !

One great national event, which had considerable influence on the cause of religious liberty, was the American war, with the revolution which followed. It was one unhappy consequence of this unnatural war, that, as it divided the people of Great Britain into two angry parties, which vented their contention with excessive violence ; so it completely destroyed that national harmony which had long subsisted before this mournful event. The conduct of the Americans was, by the administration, and by all high churchmen, stamped with the

opprobrious title of rebellion ; and they were considered by all such as the very spawn of the ancient puritans, inheriting all their unyielding resistance to ministerial edicts. As many of these Americans were enemies to episcopacy, and nearly all favourable to religious liberty ; so those in this country, who espoused similar religious principles, naturally shared the same odium. The reprobation of the war was not, however, confined to any one religious denomination, but openly maintained by many leading members in the two houses of parliament and many of the first characters in the nation, until at last the main body of the people beheld with extreme regret, the impolitic proceedings of the administration.

The cause of religious freedom appeared at first to be endangered by this unnatural contest, while its greatest friends were attached to the Americans by the peculiar ties of religious union, and the intimacy of Christian friendship. Many of the colonists held the same doctrines of faith, and maintained the same system of church government as themselves ; and in the northern states they formed almost the mass of the people. A constant and extensive intercourse had been kept up between them ; mutual assistance had been given in whatever related to the advancement of the cause of religion ; and they considered themselves as members of the same spiritual body. Who will then wonder, that, under these circumstances, the patrons of Christian freedom were steadfastly opposed to the American war ; and that the sufferings of their trans-atlantic brethren excited painful sensations in their breasts, and produced unfavourable ideas of the men, by whose measures those sufferings were inflicted ?

In the mean time, a large portion of the English clergy, that part especially which veered round from the house of Stuarts, warmly declaimed against the rebellious spirit of the Americans, and denounced their tremendous anathemas against all their abettors at home and abroad. Their violence was increased by the reports of those zealous patrons of intolerance, who were forced to flee into England, and who brought with them many doleful tales of the oppression and cruelty which they had endured for their loyalty to their king, and their attachment to their church.

When the independence of America was acknowledged and

confirmed by peace, speculation on the consequences of the trans-atlantic revolution filled the breast of every Englishman, who claimed the character of a thinking being. Every man who was a friend of his country, lamented that so large a portion of population, industry, and capital as the colonies contained, should be cut off from the body of the empire. But the lovers of mankind were consoled by the appearance of a constitution embracing the principles of religious liberty in the fullest extent, rising on the western continent remote from European politics; furnishing within its extensive boundaries an asylum for the oppressed and persecuted, and providing for future generations of the human race a catechism of principles, derived from indubitable facts, favourable to the character of individual and social happiness, and to the interests of unde-filed Christianity.

Whatever difference of opinion may now exist concerning the American revolution as to our political or commercial interests, it was an event undoubtedly most favourable to the general cause of religious liberty. It presented a system entirely new in the annals of Christendom. Those penal laws which were necessarily connected with the establishment of religion were abolished in the states in which they had formerly existed. Religion, in all its forms, was on this event equally protected; and the members of every denomination, without the shackles and burdens of subscriptions and tests, were considered as equally eligible to all the offices of the state. Washington, the first president, was an episcopalian; Adams, the second, was an independent. An alliance between church and state, by which the temporal sword of the magistrate, with its strong blade and its keen edge, might defend the ecclesiastical body, and by which the church, with her spiritual sword dipped in blood, might compel the people to yield obedience to the state, was a mystery which the Americans could not understand, and would not adopt. Religion was left to her own amiable attractions, and to the pious zeal of her friends for support. The government aiming at the people's welfare, felt no need of the cant or thunder of interested priests to secure obedience to political institutions; and the ministers of the Gospel, disdaining the idea of being the tools of political rulers, but, influenced by the spirit of their office, taught their hearers to love God

and their neighbour, to be good parents and children, good masters and servants, to be upright and virtuous in all the relations of society ; and, by inculcating these principles, they became good members of civil society, and subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. The effect of this experiment, after the lapse of nearly forty years, has been a perfect harmony among the different religious parties : no contention about religious sentiments, has ever, in the smallest degree, disturbed the peace of society ; and, from unquestionable evidence, pure and spiritual religion has been in a progressive state from the adoption of this system to the present day.

An event like the American revolution, conferring these blessings and benefits upon mankind, could not fail of making a deep and favourable impression on the minds of all the friends of religious liberty in the mother country ; and whatever might be their sentiments concerning the civil constitution and government on the other side the Atlantic, they felt constrained to admire and applaud unfettered religious freedom—the invaluable gift of the Creator, secured by law to every citizen in the commonwealth. At the same time, they were furnished with a new argument in defence of their principles, or at least a new elucidation of them, arising from indubitable fact, even the experience of a thriving and prosperous nation. This had a wonderful effect, not only by establishing their minds in the practicability and incalculable utility of their principles, but also by diffusing those principles among nearly all classes of society in every corner of the land.

The English clergy and civil authorities, however, soon discovered extreme jealousy, and unjustly accused the friends of unfettered religious freedom, as enemies to kingly government, and stigmatized them republicans, aiming at the overthrow both of church and state ! This great, but common delusion would easily have discovered its own fallacy, and corrected its own errors, had it been recollected, that the most extensive liberty in the church of God, is perfectly compatible with kingly government in the state, and that all the burdensome ecclesiastical enactments in the world may be utterly abolished, and every man allowed to embrace and support the religion of his own choice, without the alteration, much less the subversion, of their political and civil constitutions. As is usual in such

cases, the accusations brought against the patrons of Christian liberty were fallacious, and contrary to innumerable facts, originating in the ignorance, bigotry, or intolerance of their accusers. The word of God has not prescribed to any nation what particular form of civil government should be adopted, but has left every kingdom and empire to its own unbiased choice; and it is indispensably necessary to every free government, whatever may be the political form of it, that every subject be allowed the unbiased choice of his religion, to the exclusion of every species of imposition and coercion in matters of faith and worship.

In addition to this great convulsion in the political world, several events took place within our own shores, by which the great cause of religious freedom was particularly affected. Among the various exertions which were made to extend its dominion and triumphs, the first was made from a quarter which excited universal astonishment, presenting a new phenomenon in the annals of England. In the last reign, the reader's attention was directed to the controversy among the clergy concerning subscription to creeds and articles of faith; but, during this reign, their views became so far matured, and their courage so far increased, that, in the year 1772, several hundreds of the established clergy, supported by many respectable laymen, presented a petition to parliament, praying for entire deliverance from subscription to the thirty-nine articles.

This petition stated, as a fundamental principle of the protestant religion, that every thing necessary to salvation is fully and sufficiently contained in the holy Scriptures; that the petitioners had an inherent right, which they held from God only, to make a full and free use of their private judgment, in the interpretation of the Scriptures, that, though these were the liberal and original principles of the church of England, and upon which the reformation from popery was founded, they had been set aside by the laws relating to subscription, by which they were deprived of their invaluable rights, and required to acknowledge certain articles and confessions of faith, drawn up by fallible men, to be all of them agreeable to the Scriptures.

These subscriptions were further represented as a great hin-

drance to the propagation of true religion, since they discouraged free inquiry into the meaning of the sacred writings, they tended to divide communions, and sowed discords among protestants. That the diversity of opinions, held upon many of these articles, occasioned great animosity and ill-will among the established clergy; that they afforded an opportunity to unbelievers to charge them with prevarication, and with being influenced by secularity or political views, in subscribing to articles which they could not believe, and about which no two were agreed in opinion; that they afforded an advantage to papists, to reproach them with inconsistency, by departing from the principles on which they had grounded their separation from Rome, and now admitting of human ordinances and doubtful doctrines, though they pretended that the Scripture alone was certain and sufficient to salvation.

The two professions of civil law and physic joining in this petition, complained of the hardships they suffered, particularly at one of the universities, seeing they were obliged, on their first admission, and at an age so immature for disquisitions and decisions of such great moment, to subscribe their unfeigned assent to a variety of theological propositions, in order to be able to attain academical degrees in their respective faculties; and their private opinions on those subjects could be of no great consequence to the public, since the course of their studies, and the attention to their practice, afforded them neither the means nor the leisure to examine such propositions. They lamented the misfortune of their sons, who, at an age before the habit of reflection could be formed, or their judgment matured, were irrecoverably bound down, on numerous points of abstruse theology, to the opinions of ages less reformed than their own.

Sir William Meredith having presented this petition, said, that what it solicited was deserving of the most serious consideration; that it was repugnant to the liberality which so happily prevailed, to oblige people to subscribe to the truth of articles which they could not believe; that such injunctions tended to establish, under an authority professedly religious, habits of prevarication and irreligion; that they were productive of great licentiousness in the church, and had a direct tendency to destroy Christian charity. The removal of these unwor-

thy shackles, he said, would give an unshaken firmness to the established church; and no danger could arise from such a reformation, so long as the hierarchy and the bishops existed.

Sir Roger Newdigate, on the contrary, considered the petition as a prayer to annihilate the church of England! He understood, that the greater number of those who had signed the petition were clergymen, who must therefore have subscribed these exceptionable articles; so that however tender their consciences were, they could now quiet them. It was such tender consciences, he said, that subverted the church of England in the last century, and that similar consequences would now ensue, if the house granted the indulgence prayed for. He maintained, that the house could not receive the petition, without a direct breach of the articles by which England and Scotland were united!

Mr. Solicitor General was of opinion, that subscription to certain articles of faith was necessary for the clergy of every ecclesiastical establishment; but the objection to granting the petition, because it would violate the union of the two countries, he showed to be without foundation, seeing the legislature had, in several instances, exerted the power of altering church government since that union. Mr. Burke observed, that the church subsisted before the thirty-nine articles were framed, and consequently the thirty-nine articles could not be essential to the existence of the church. The articles at first consisted of forty-two; why then might they not be farther reduced, as good sense and liberal sentiments gained ground? Sir George Saville said, that protestants derived their appellation from the first adherents to those principles which we professed, when we protested against forms prescribed by human authority; and shall we maintain the necessity of prescribing modes of faith, when our principles reject the idea of any such power belonging to human beings?

The house in general seemed to be of opinion, that binding the professors of law and physic to subscription, was of very trivial moment to the public; and it was expressed as a wish, on all sides of the house, that the universities would afford those professors the desired relief, as well as young students at the time of matriculation.

Lord George Germain insisted that it was a heavy griev-

ance, for a youth at college to be required to subscribe his assent to, or belief of, the thirty-nine articles, earlier than the age of sixteen, when it was not to be supposed he could understand them, or had formed any opinion concerning them. He defended the character of the petitioners, from the imputation which had been thrown out against them, that they had renounced their principles, when, by subscribing, they had accepted of their benefices. He said, he lived in a county where many of the clergy had signed the petition, whom he knew to be worthy, conscientious, and pious men; many had assented to the articles, with that forced construction which was put upon them by those who could not believe the truth of some of them. The sentiments which many entertained at the time when they gave their assent to those articles, had been by farther reflection changed, and their conscientious scruples being awakened by such a different view of things, rendered the step they had taken highly laudable; he therefore acquitted them of all dissimulation in their former conformity. After much opposition from those of high tory principles, the prayer of the petitioners was rejected by a considerable majority.*

In the debates on the petition of the dissatisfied clergy, when the case of the subscription of dissenters was mentioned, some of the most strenuous opposers declared themselves willing to relieve them from subscription to the thirty-five articles and a half, which the existing laws still imposed upon them. As the clergy reaped the substantial benefits of the establishment, it was deemed equitable that, since they were the servants of the state, they should conform to all the regulations which the legislature thought proper for the public instruction; but, as the dissenters enjoyed none of these emoluments, it was accounted reasonable that they should be permitted to believe and to preach those religious doctrines, which accorded with the convictions of their minds.†

This seeming liberality gave great pleasure and satisfaction to the dissenting ministers, whose views of the Gospel were so far expanded and improved, that very few of them were the advocates of subscription. At this favourable juncture, a motion for the relief of protestant dissenting ministers from subscrip-

* Clarke, vol. iii. p. 261—264.

† Ibid. p. 268.

tion to the articles, was made in the house of commons by Sir Harry Houghton, which was seconded by Sir George Saville, one of the first characters in England, both for personal and public virtue, and leave given to bring in a bill to that effect. It was ushered into the house with the most flattering expectations of gaining entire approbation. But, as a certain *mania* had seized high churchmen whenever it had been suggested to guarantee any privilege to the dissenters, so it exerted its powerful influence on this occasion, and roused the most vigorous opposition to the bill.

To free the dissenters from subscription, they said, would fill the country with enthusiasm, absurdity, and error ! When the present wholesome restraint was removed, arians, socinians, and even deists would deface and undermine the Christian religion ! Since the application of the clergy, who had a prior claim to favour, was refused, certainly the dissenters ought not to have their wishes gratified. It might, they said, be called a bill not for the relief, but for the encouragement of dissenters, by which the church of England would be weakened and injured, and a republican religion, at all times a foe to monarchy and episcopacy, would be strengthened and cherished ! In addition to all this delusion, it was said, that the act of toleration was designed for the protection of those who could subscribe the articles enjoined ; but those who now came forward with their complaints, must be persons of a different character, and therefore not entitled to its privileges ! The penalties of the law, though they hung over them in terror, were never enforced against those who did not subscribe : why then did they trouble the government, from whose lenity they enjoyed so many blessings ? To pass this bill into a law, it was added, would be rewarding dissenters for disregarding the act of toleration !

The reasoning of the advocates of the bill easily dispelled the airy sophisms of their opponents ; and the more effectually to confirm their arguments in favour of religious liberty, they adduced facts. Neither in Scotland nor in Ireland was subscription required of dissenters from the churches established in those countries ; and yet not one injurious consequence had arisen from the enjoyment of their liberty. The weight of these considerations was felt by the house ; the bill passed with

the general concurrence, and could even boast of the approbation, or, at least, the acquiescence of the minister.

The bill being transmitted to the upper house, met with a very different reception from the lords. The bishops, those vigilant guardians of the church, ever anxious for its safety, and tremblingly alive to all its concerns, thought that they discovered danger in the bill, and summoning all the powers of their eloquence, gave it the most decided opposition. That deference which the British nobility usually feel for their spiritual guides on all points of theology, so as to be fair patterns to their inferiors, was felt on this occasion. Upon the vote of the house, therefore, the bill was thrown out by a very great majority.*

The patrons of better principles not being driven to despair by the frowns of the episcopal bench, determined to make a second attempt, and the following year the bill was again introduced, when it passed the commons with substantial marks of approbation. But when it was carried to the lords, the former opposition was renewed, and with equal effect; for it was again thrown out. In the course of the debate, Dr. Drummond, archbishop of York, feeling all the spirit of his order, attacked the dissenting ministers with singular violence, and charged them with being "men of close ambition." They had, however, the happiness to find an able advocate in the great earl of Chatham, who rose in reply, and said—"This is judging uncharitably, and whoever brings such a charge without proof, defames." Here he paused a moment, and then added: "The dissenting ministers are represented as men of close ambition; they are so, my lords; and their ambition is to keep close to the college of fishermen, not of cardinals; and to the doctrine of the inspired apostles, not to the decrees of interested and aspiring bishops. They contend for a spiritual creed and spiritual worship: we have a calvinistic creed, a popish liturgy, and an arminian clergy. The reformation has laid open the Scriptures to all; let not the bishops shut them again. Laws in support of ecclesiastical power are pleaded, which it would shock humanity to execute. It is said that religious sects have done great mischief when they were not

* Clarke, vol. iii. p. 269.

kept under restraint : but history affords no proof that sects have ever been mischievous, when they were not oppressed and persecuted by the ruling church."

After repeated applications for relief, rendered unsuccessful by the formidable and decided opposition on the episcopal bench, the cause seemed to be set for ever at rest, at least till all those bishops and nobles had slept with their predecessors and their fathers. The determination of the English peers was not like the laws of the Medes and Persians, which could not be altered. In the space only of a few years, unexpected occurrences transpired to render it proper for the dissenting ministers to resume their efforts to obtain what they had so earnestly desired. At a period, therefore, not farther distant than 1779, the subject was again brought forwards, and, on the motion of Sir Harry Houghton, a bill was introduced, which passed not only the commons, but also the lords, with an opposition so feeble as not to be worthy of notice. The dangers to both church and state, which, six years before, were so formidable if the dissenters did not subscribe the thirty-five articles and a half, now all at once vanished ; and, instead of that subscription, the dissenters might with perfect safety to the civil and ecclesiastical constitution of England, put their name to the following declaration : " I, A. B. do solemnly declare in the presence of Almighty God that I am a Christian and a Protestant, and as such, that I believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as commonly received among protestant churches, do contain the revealed will of God, and that I do receive the same as the rule of my doctrine and practice."

In the debates of the upper house, the very liberal sentiments of Dr. Shipley, bishop of St. Asaph, the friend and disciple of Hoadly, are worthy of a place in the annals of Christian freedom. He argued strenuously against the imposition of every species of confession, however brief, general, and true. " It is," said he, " the duty of magistrates ; it is, indeed, the very end of magistrates, to protect all men in the enjoyment of their natural rights, of which the free exercise of their religion is one of the first and best. All history is full of the mischiefs occasioned by the want of toleration. One might naturally ask a minister of state for a good pension, or a good

contract, or a place at court ; but hardly any one would think of making interest with him for a place in heaven."

When the historian of religious liberty is able to record a victory in favour of Roman catholics, the circumstance must be peculiarly grateful to every enlightened protestant. It is difficult to describe the injustice and cruelty of the English government to that body of people, during the reigns of queen Elizabeth and several of her successors. We have our book of martyrs, in which is detailed how our pious ancestors suffered unto death by Roman catholics ; but few comparatively are aware that Roman catholics have also their book of martyrs, almost as long and as bloody as our own, in which English protestants were the executioners !

To the tolerant reign of George the Third was the honour reserved of expunging from the catalogue of English laws, many of those persecuting statutes against the members of the church of Rome, which would have disgraced the code of Nero, and which, having so long been allowed to form a part of ours, were a national injustice, and a national infamy. Who can read without horror, that by acts of parliament " popish priests and jesuits found officiating in the services of their church were declared guilty of felony ? If a Roman catholic gentleman was educated abroad, his estate was forfeited to the next protestant heir ! A son who became a protestant might strip his father, if a Roman catholic, of his estate, and take possession of it for himself ; and catholics were declared incapable of acquiring real property by purchase." These instances of national infamy, are more particularly related in the former volume.

To that humane and virtuous senator Sir George Saville was reserved the honour of proposing to the house of commons a repeal of these horrid statutes ; and he prefaced his proposal in the following language : " I mean to vindicate the honour and assert the principles of the protestant religion, to which all persecution is foreign and adverse. The penalties in question are disgraceful, not only to religion, but to humanity. They are calculated to loosen all the bands of society, to dissolve all social, moral, and religious obligations, to poison the sources of domestic felicity, and to annihilate every principle of honour." The motion received the unanimous approbation of the house.

The peers concurred in sentiments with the commons; and, to the honour of our legislature and our country, most of these barbarous laws were erased from the statute-book of England.

This act of justice and humanity could not be exercised without the most disgraceful opposition out of doors. Tumults took place first in Scotland, then in England, when many Roman catholic chapels and houses were destroyed by the outrageous multitude. Newgate prison, in which some of the chief rioters were confined, was attacked and burnt to the ground, and several other jails shared the same fate. The houses of lord Mansfield and Sir George Saville were demolished; and the furious mob was extending its destructive steps far and wide, when, to supply the defects of the civil power, the entrance of the military put a stop to their ravages, and restored tranquillity to the terrified inhabitants of London.*

The dissenters understood the doctrine of religious liberty better than any other class of men in the kingdom. It had been the object of their consideration for more than a century, and was become a fixed and governing principle in their minds. To prevent any sect of people, however erroneous their opinions, from worshipping God according to the dictates of their consciences, appeared to the generality of them equally unjust as to rob them of their temporal property, or take away their lives. From these acts of violence and outrage we see how dangerous are false principles; and that all these evils are avoided by persons of enlightened minds, acting under the influence of the Gospel.

The deliverance of the Roman catholics from the operation of persecuting statutes was still imperfect; but a bill was brought into the house of commons in 1791, to grant them relief from those which still remained unrepealed. The benefit of this bill was, indeed, limited to such of them as could subscribe a declaration against the assumed authority of the pope in temporal matters. Mr. Fox pleaded with all his force of argument, that the limitation might be expunged, and liberty granted on the broadest basis. He was supported by Mr. Burke, whose liberality in religious opinions, and eloquence

* Clarke, vol. iii. p. 355.

in behalf of those who held them, never forsook him when Roman catholics had any thing to ask or receive. Mr. Pitt argued for the limitation; and his voice prevailed. As many of the catholics could not conscientiously assent to the declaration, they were excluded from the benefit of the act.

Some years after the first successful efforts of the catholics, a subject which had long preyed on the minds of the protestant dissenters was brought into public notice. The corporation and test acts they had long felt as burdens of oppressive weight, and constantly expressed their desire of deliverance; but the spirit of the times would not encourage their application for relief. A period of nearly forty years having elapsed, which had introduced into all the high offices an entirely new generation of men, the public mind, as the dissenters thought, was undergoing a gradual melioration in favour of religious liberty; and the day was arrived when those fetters, which, for more than a century, had not only confined, but degraded them in the eyes of their fellow-subjects, would be completely struck off, and thrown away, or hung in triumph of their deliverance. The success, with which their attempt to obtain freedom from subscription had been finally crowned, animated them with the hope of a similar issue in this business. The kind dispositions, too, which had been manifested to the Roman catholics, in breaking a system of restriction which had subsisted for centuries, still farther confirmed them in opinion, that intolerance had departed from all the intelligent ranks of society, and was becoming feeble in the minds of the vulgar multitude. Their expectations of success were raised still higher by the intelligence, which those of the dissenting body, after waiting on the prime minister, Mr. Pitt, announced to their friends, even that, if he did not patronize their cause, he discovered no hostility to the steps which they proposed to take.

With these flattering prospects, the protestant dissenters, in 1787, applied to parliament for the repeal of the corporation and test acts, so far as related to themselves. Mr. Beaufoy, a man of great talents and respectability, introduced the subject to the house of commons, and supported his motion by an able speech, in which, after giving an historical account of the two acts, and answering the objections usually adduced, he power-

fully urged the claims of the dissenters to equal privileges with their fellow-subjects ; and in conclusion he argued for the repeal from considerations of a purely religious nature. The motion found an opponent in lord North, who painted in glowing colours the danger to which the church would be exposed by the proposed innovation ; and insisted that the corporation and test acts were merely political regulations, and that the exclusion of dissenters from offices of trust could not be considered either as an injury or a disgrace. With far greater ability, these acts were defended by Mr. Pitt, who, while he expressed the highest esteem for the dissenters who had ever been the firm friends of constitutional liberty, said he could not consent to the repeal of the acts which were obnoxious to them. Mr. Fox supported the proposed measure, and though, as he observed, the generality of the dissenters had been his opponents in his struggle with Mr. Pitt ; yet as their cause was the cause of liberty, it should have his most strenuous aid. In the course of his speech, he demonstrated the impolicy and absurdity of making religion a test in political affairs ; and he charged Mr. Pitt with abetting persecution in principle, though he declined to defend it in words. On a division of the house, the motion was lost.

Although the measure proved unsuccessful, the discussion produced a very important effect. Many were convinced that nothing could be more reasonable and just, than the abolition of the two obnoxious statutes ; and that the measure would not only secure to many of his majesty's worthy subjects an augmentation of their natural rights and liberties, but also be productive of greater security to the church, and of additional strength, prosperity, and happiness to the state. Not discouraged, therefore, with this repulse, the dissenters made a second attempt two years after, and Mr. Beaufoy again appeared as their advocate in the house of commons. Lord North and Mr. Pitt were again the opponents of the repeal ; and Mr. Fox, reasoning on general principles, pleaded most powerfully for the removal of these impolitic acts, which prevented the state and the country from profiting by the talents of men of every denomination. The result of the debate was more favourable to the cause of liberty than on the former occasion : one hundred and two members voted for the repeal, and one

hundred and twenty-two for the continuance of the acts. This decision seemed to the friends of liberty to be half a victory, and inspired them with still livelier hopes of success on a future application, which it was their determination soon to make.*

Having pledged themselves to the public, and made the necessary preparations, the patrons of spiritual melioration felt themselves bound in honour to persevere in their attempts to obtain relief. Confiding, therefore, in the goodness of their cause, they, in 1790, laid it a third time before the house of commons. Mr. Fox was employed to introduce their request. Whether, since he was the opponent of the minister, it was prudent to assign him this office, has been questioned by many. As it ought certainly to have been no party question; so if reason and truth had been the presiding genius of the commons house of parliament, and if causes were to be decided only by weight of argument, they could not have made a happier choice. Mr. Fox's unequalled talents were called, on this occasion, into active and vigorous operation. He laid a firm foundation on the principles of religious liberty, which he stated and demonstrated with peculiar felicity and energy, and upon them he founded his powerful reasonings for the repeal of the obnoxious acts. Sir Harry Houghton seconded the motion, and Mr. Beaufoy supported it with more than common ability. Mr. W. Smith and Mr. Tierney spoke on the same side of the question. Mr. Pitt, as on the former occasions, stood forth the patron and panegyrist of the acts, and pleaded for the continuance with the utmost exertion of his remarkable powers. He was followed by Mr. Burke, in a speech of singular ingenuity and eloquence; but, though he was hostile to the repeal, he disapproved of the Lord's supper being used as the test, and signified that he brought with him a proposal for one of a different kind; yet he left the house without giving his vote. Sir William Dolben and Mr. Wilberforce closed the list of opponents. On the division of the house, the motion was thrown out by a considerable majority.†

Mr. Fox, adverting to the state of the primitive church, said—Were we to recur to first principles, and observe the

* Debates in the Commons in 1789.

† Debates of Commons, 1790.

progress of the Christian religion, in the first stages of its propagation, we should perceive that no vice, evil, or detriment, had ever sprung from religious freedom. Persecution had always been a fertile source of much evil: perfidy, cruelty, and murder had often been the consequences of intolerant principles. The massacres of Paris, the martyrdoms of Smithfield, and the executions of the Inquisition, were among the many horrid and detestable crimes which had, at different times, originated solely from persecution. To suppose a man wicked or immoral, merely on account of any difference of religious opinion, was as foolish as it was absurd; yet this was the original principle of persecution. Morality was thought to be most effectually defended and propagated by insisting on a general unity of religious sentiments; the dogmas of men in power were to be substituted in the room of every other religious opinion, as it might best answer the ends of policy and ambition: it proceeded entirely on this grand fundamental error—that one man could better judge of the religious opinions of another, than the man himself could. Upon this absurd principle, persecution might be consistent; but in this it resembled madness, the characteristic of which was acting consistently upon wrong principles.

The doctrines of Christianity might have been expected to possess sufficient influence to counteract this great error; but the reverse had proved to be the case. Torture and death had been the auxiliaries of persecution—the grand engines used in support of one particular system of religious opinions, to the extermination of every other. Toleration proceeded on directly contrary principles. Its doctrines, he was sorry to say, even in this enlightened age, were only of modern date in any part of the world. Before the reign of king William, it had not a footing in England. The celebrated act of toleration of that reign, notwithstanding the boasted liberality of its principle, was narrow, confined, and incomplete. What was it but a toleration of *thirty-four* articles out of thirty-nine, prescribed as the standard of belief in matters of religion? Were any tolerated who did not subscribe to the thirty-four articles in question? No. Strict and implicit conformity to these was enjoined on accepting any civil employment.

Persecution, indeed, originally might be allowed to proceed

on this principle of kindness—to promote a unity of religious opinion, and to prevent error in the important matters of Christian belief. But did persecution ever succeed in this humane and truly charitable design? Never. Toleration, on the other hand, was founded on the broad and liberal basis of reason and philosophy. It consisted in a just diffidence of our own particular opinions, and recommended universal charity and forbearance to the world around us. The true friend of religious freedom ought never to impute evil intentions to another, whose opinions, in his apprehension, may be attended with dangerous consequences: this would be the height of illiberality. Persecution always said, “I know the consequences of your opinions better than you know them yourselves.” But the language of religious freedom was always amicable, liberal, and just: it confessed its doubts, and acknowledged its ignorance, saying, “Though I dislike your opinions, because I think them dangerous; yet, since you profess such opinions, I will not believe you can think such dangerous inferences flow from them, which so forcibly strike my attention.” This is a just and legitimate mode of reasoning, always less liable to error, and more adapted to human affairs.*

There is one view in which the subject ought to be considered, and in which it was represented by the friends of liberty, wherein the failure of the above attempt ought to excite the regret of every one who claims the character of a disciple of Jesus Christ. The acts in question, requiring a religious test for a civil office, necessarily encouraged an awful profanation of the most sacred ordinance ever instituted by our blessed Redeemer: and though there had been no dissenters in England, the reason for the abolition would have been equally forcible, as long as the horrid injunction continued, to compel every man who obtained a public office under government, to receive the Lord’s supper as a necessary qualification for entrance and possession.

That in the Lord’s supper, the Saviour of men had no other than a *religious* object in view, the spiritual improvement and consolation of his disciples, is as clear as the light of the noon-day sun; and it is equally clear, that by his disciples

* Fox’s Speeches, vol. iv. p. 57—59.

alone it ought to be received with this end in view. It is an ordinance for the administration of the affairs of that kingdom which is not of this world. How dreadful is the perversion, when one of the kingdoms of this world, seizing on its most sacred institution, wrests it from its original design, and employs it to answer an entirely secular purpose. It is some consolation to reflect that Christianity had been in the world more than *sixteen hundred* years, before this profanation of the sacrament became possible among those who called themselves Christians. What Englishman then will not blush to recollect that his country *alone* has been polluted by this odious crime; and what churchman will not weep that his *communion* alone has been contaminated by this foulest of stains! Popery never conceived and brought forth any thing more impious. Transubstantiation is a trivial error when placed by the side of the sacrament in the church of England, when debased into a qualification for an office in the excise, or a commission in the army or navy.

The offence against the God of holiness, and the dishonour of the Saviour of sinners, by this prostitution of his holy ordinance, no words of man can sufficiently express: angels would in vain attempt to describe it. The guilt contracted from year to year by multitudes of thoughtless creatures, who, though they may be brave soldiers and sailors, or good servants of civil government; yet never professed to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Christ, may justly draw from the eyes of Christians tears of blood. What then must be the criminal conduct of the clergy who administer the sacrament to these men? and what the more tremendous condition at the awful tribunal of God, of a legislature *enjoining* the clergy to administer, and the officer to receive it, especially as part of that legislature consists of bishops and archbishops who claim to themselves the highest functions in the kingdom of Jesus Christ? In this impartial view of the subject, there remains nothing but, with fear and trembling, to look for the wrath of heaven in the severest judgments on a land polluted "by crucifying the Lord afresh, and putting him to open shame."

These are not the views of dissenters alone; but some of the worthiest and most respectable sons of the church have viewed the subject in the same odious light. As venerable a clergy-

man as ever was ordained by a bishop, the Rev. John Newton, of St. Mary, Woolnoth, bears his indignant testimony against this flagrant and odious profanation: "I am far from supposing, that any of our laws now in force were formed with an intention of promoting sin: but some of them, through the prevailing depravation of morals amongst us, do it eventually. For instance the test and corporation acts, which require every person who has a post under government, or a commission in the navy or army, to qualify himself for his office by receiving the sacrament of the Lord's supper, would occasion no sin, if men were generally influenced by the fear of God, or even by a principle of integrity. They would then rather decline places of honour or profit, than accept them upon such terms, if they were conscious that their sentiments or conduct were repugnant to the design of that institution. But as the case stands at present, while gain is preferred to godliness, and the love of distinction or lucre is stronger than the dictates of conscience, we frequently see professed infidels and notorious libertines approach the Lord's table as a matter of course, prostituting the most solemn ordinance of Christianity to their ambition and interest. The great number and variety of appointments, civil and military, which cannot be legally possessed without this qualification, render the enormity almost as common as it is heinous. If the Lord be a God of knowledge, he cannot be deceived. If he be a God of truth and holiness he will not be mocked. I am afraid we have been long guilty of a contemptuous profanation of the body and blood of Christ."*

To the testimony of this excellent minister of Christ, may be added the suffrage of an eloquent senator, high in the estimation of many, and who, when it is known to be Mr. Burke, will not be suspected of having in his head or heart one particle of disaffection against either church or state. In his speech, when the subject was last before the house of commons, are the following expressions:—"If the corporation and test acts were repealed, some other test ought to be substituted: the present I always thought a bad and insufficient test to its end. I am convinced it is an abuse of the sacramental rite; and the sacramental rite is too solemn an act for prostitution. Where

conscience really exists, it ought not to be wounded. By wounding a man's conscience, we annihilate the God within (if I may be allowed so to express it) and violate him in his sanctuary."*

The test could have force only in proportion as the men it was intended to disqualify were under the influence of religious principle; and, on this account, their very punishment was no ordinary eulogium on their character. Men's unbribed loyalty is much less suspicious when it rests on a conscientious attachment to laws, rather than on the enjoyment of immunities; men who love their country not the less for being restrained from serving it; men, whose regard for religion and public morals, is evinced by their furnishing a double share of contribution towards the support of Christian ministers; men who believe without a premium for believing, and who honour the sacrament so highly as to tremble at profaning it; these are the persons, the only class of protestants, against whom the test, thus unjustly and fraudulently perverted from its original design, could avail as a security. Its only operation consists in excluding these men from the civil administration !†

The groans and lamentations of the children of Africa, torn from their homes, and dragged into slavery in distant lands, awakened the pity of a Clarkson and a Wilberforce; and the unparalleled labours of the one, and the eloquence of the other, were not employed without success, by procuring the abolition of the barbarous traffic. Shall Jesus Christ find none to plead his cause, and to rescue his most sacred institution from the vilest profanation? Is there no disciple of Christ in the legislature sufficiently enlightened and zealous to employ his most vigorous efforts to obtain a legal abolition of this lamentable perversion of the sacrament, and restore it to its only proper use? Is there no individual among the ten thousands of the clergy—not one of all her learned prelates to stand up for the honour of his master, by seeking to remove the foul reproach from his communion? If in public stations such a man cannot be found, is there no Christian in the humbler walks of life who will step forward and endeavour to deliver his country

* Debates in Commons, 1790.

† Conder's Noncon. p. 589.

from the divine displeasure, for profaning the most sacred institution of Christ? Exertions in this cause, even though not crowned with immediate success, would give honour to his name both on earth and in heaven: if successful, his name would be entered on the records of fame among the highest benefactors of his country. Already has the sacramental test disgraced England for more than one hundred and forty years; again and again have dissenters cried to parliament against the shocking crime, but they have cried in vain: it remains for churchmen, therefore, now to wipe these deepest stains from the table of the Lord.

If this was not the period of gaining the triumphs for religious liberty, it was at least the era of making the most worthy attempts. There still existed in the statute-book, numerous laws inflicting penalties on persons who absented themselves from the service of the church of England, or who spoke in derogation of the church or the Book of Common-prayer. The celebrated lord Stanhope, to free our venerable code from what he considered as a public disgrace to the country, made a motion in the upper house of parliament, for the introduction of a bill to repeal these vexatious acts.

The ire of the episcopal bench was immediately kindled against his lordship's motion, which they accounted a profane attempt to undermine the foundation of the church! Dr. Moore, archbishop of Canterbury, assured the house, that the bill, if permitted to pass, would serve as a cover to every species of irreligion: and if people were allowed without restraint to speak, write, and publish on religious subjects, there was scarcely any mischief to the church or to civil society that imagination could frame, which might not be effected!! The very foundation of religion as by law established might be undermined!! The unrestricted diffusion of *religious opinions*, according to his grace, would endanger both church and state!!

Nor did his grace stand alone in defence of public institutions. The bishops of Bangor, St. Asaph, and St. David's, the last with his usual characteristic violence, endeavoured to confirm the assertions and fears of the metropolitan. The effect of these speeches on the majority of the temporal peers was exactly what the learned prelates desired. So powerful did their arguments appear, and so meritorious was their zeal

for the church, that lord Stormont, in raptures, exclaimed, " Our venerable fathers in God have done themselves infinite credit, and rendered their characters sacred in the public estimation." It is scarcely necessary to add, that lord Stanhope's generous attempt utterly failed. So that the barbarous statute, inflicting the penalty of twenty pounds a month upon *all churchmen*, who absent themselves from the public service of the church, with all the train of penal statutes through the reigns of Elizabeth, James I., Charles I., and Charles II., against churchmen, were left unrepealed ; and, to the intolerable disgrace of the English statute-book, without doing any good to the church, they remain unrepealed and in full force to this day against all churchmen who may be found transgressors, though perhaps not in all points either the most conscientiously obeyed, or the most carefully executed. These unlovely relics of antiquity the worthy prelates held sacred, as well from a solemn veneration for their forefathers, as from their unfeigned love to the church !

The repeated failures did not produce despair ; for, in the year 1792, another effort was made to extend the boundaries of religious liberty. Mr. Fox, who had always showed a readiness to advocate the cause, introduced a motion into the house of commons for the repeal of those penal statutes, which, notwithstanding the toleration act, still hung over the heads of those who denied the doctrine of the Trinity. He justly represented them as a disgrace to the statutes of the realm ; adduced instances in which persons had suffered by their operation ; and expressed his earnest wish, that heretics should not now, as formerly, be consumed by fire, but that this should be the fate of the persecuting acts still in existence.

When Mr. Fox announced his intentions to the commons, he said, he wished to know, as the established church depended on acts of parliament, who gave them a right to decide upon religious opinions, and by what model could they ascertain which opinions were right, and which were wrong ? It was observed by some, that the pope was infallible ; by others, that the church and council were infallible ; but none had ever contended that the parliament was infallible : They might subject men to fines and penalties for being better than themselves ; at all events, only for differing from them in matters of faith, and in their mode of worshipping the Deity.

When he made the motion to the house, speaking of the persecuting laws still in force, he said—persecution is the condemnation of a man before he has committed any crime. It compels a man to live in a continued state of hypocrisy towards God and man. It calls on those who do not believe the doctrines of the church of England to give a constant attendance at divine service, and subscribe to her numerous ceremonies. This is commanding hypocrisy by authority. It is ordaining by law, that a man shall pursue that religion here, which, in his mind, will ensure his eternal damnation hereafter. By this we say to fathers: “You shall not teach your son that religion which in your soul you believe will secure his eternal happiness. You are either to teach him no religion at all, or to teach him that by which you believe he will be lost for ever.” This was unquestionably the case in the existing laws respecting the catholics. The most dangerous periods, even the reigns of Elizabeth and James, did not justify any one of these penal statutes; and if such times did not justify them, he asked, what argument could be used to justify them now? He, therefore, concluded by moving for the repeal of many of the penal statutes, and he had no doubt that a repeal of the rest would afterwards follow.*

Mr. Pitt, in the debate on the test act, had declared, in the most unqualified terms, the right of the dissenters to a complete toleration; on this account it was expected by the friends of the repeal, that he would have given no opposition to the measure. But they were mistaken; for he argued against the motion from the irritated state of the public mind, which, he thought, would be offended by granting such indulgence; and from the security which antitrinitarians enjoyed in defending and propagating their opinions, since the statutes in question had fallen into disuse and oblivion! On a division of the house, therefore, the motion was rejected.

After these unsuccessful attempts, no further applications were made to the government for many years. The nation was now deeply involved in war with France, and party politics ran high; so that such attempts were deemed unseasonable. During this protracted period, the great cause of reli-

* Fox's Speeches, vol. iv. p. 149, 422.

gious liberty was neither relinquished nor yet in a declining state, but was progressively increasing among the various classes of society. The acknowledged imperfection of the laws of toleration was rendered comparatively unimportant by the spirit which prevailed. The legal authorities practically extended their provisions with a liberal hand; and the penal laws, continuing to slumber unawakened, were almost forgotten, and religious worship experienced no legal interruption. The social and national advantages of this practical freedom were manifest in every part of the kingdom. Piety was promoted. Districts almost barbarous were civilized. The rudest hamlets profited by gratuitous instruction, and multitudes who sat in darkness and the shadow of death were enlightened and animated by heavenly truth.

The rapid increase of the professors of evangelical religion, and of numerous edifices for public worship, which every where gladdened the hearts of pious Christians, excited jealousy and opposition in another quarter. Persecution awoke. The penal statutes, after a lapse of years, were unexpectedly revived. Prosecutions under the old Conventicle act commenced. Punishments were inflicted for nonattendance at the parish church. The laws for toleration at many sessions received new and unprecedented interpretations; and, emboldened by unresisting acquiescence, or encouraged by those who were considered as the guardians of religion, the subject was, at length, laid before the parliament; when the privileges of those who did not worship God within the walls of the established church, were in extreme danger. This was by the introduction of a bill into the upper house of parliament by viscount Sidmouth.

Notwithstanding the professed candour and good intentions of this nobleman, his secular and erroneous views of Christianity suggested to him a measure totally subversive of religious liberty, as well as of the intentions of the present legislative toleration. Had his lordship succeeded, which he probably would have done, if the patrons of Christian freedom had not shown their strong abhorrence of the measure, a very large proportion of methodist and itinerant preachers, as well as all students and candidates for the ministry, would have been put out of the protection of the laws, and left to the mercy of the

magistrates throughout the kingdom. As this business seriously affected the rights and privileges of Britons, it will be necessary to give a circumstantial account of the various proceedings which led to a termination of one of the most obnoxious measures known in modern times.

On the 9th of May, 1811, the noble viscount, according to notice, proposed in the house of lords, "a Bill to explain and render more effectual the Acts of 1st William and Mary, and the 19th of George III., so far as relates to Dissenting ministers." The reasons which his lordship urged in favour of the measure, were chiefly founded on the abuses which he stated to have arisen from the interpretation given to the law in most parts of the country; and the description of persons, who, under that interpretation, had obtained *licenses* as preachers, without any inquiry into their moral or intellectual qualifications. The viscount said, "it was to be regretted, that, up to the period of the revolution, the history of religion, in this country, was a history of intolerance and persecution: and whatever party was uppermost, whether catholic, protestant, or puritan, the same want of toleration for diversity of opinion was displayed." After some further detail, his lordship took a view of the state of the established church: observing, that, from the deficiency of accommodations in its places of public worship, many persons were driven to dissenting meeting-houses, as the only places where they could receive religious instruction. In his opinion, therefore, it was highly important that some means should be used to prevent us from having a nominal established church, and a sectarian people!

Upon the proposal of the measure, lord Holland said he would not act so irregularly, as to oppose the first reading of the bill, but he thought right to state that he could not agree in the opinion which his noble friend seemed to adopt as the basis of his motion, even that it was only by the *permission of government*, that a man was entitled to preach those religious doctrines which he believed. He, on the contrary, was of opinion, that every man had a right to preach those religious opinions which he conscientiously believed to be truth. He regretted that the noble viscount had spoken invidiously of persons in inferior stations in life becoming preachers; for surely they had an equal right to preach their own religious principles,

as those who enjoyed the rich endowments of the church. He regretted also, that his noble friend had interfered with the subject at all, as in his opinion it could only tend to excite dissensions. No case had been made out, which called for the interference of parliament. The exemptions from civil duties, of which the noble viscount complained, could only apply to a very few persons; and it was better that these few persons should have their exemptions, than that parliament should run the risk of exciting those discords and alarms, which must be created by meddling with the toleration act. He concluded by expressing his decided hostility against the object of the bill, and he thought it an infinitely wiser course to leave the toleration act untouched.

The second reading of the bill was deferred till the 21st of May. This afforded the patrons of freedom an opportunity of procuring signatures to petitions, which was so well improved by the various parties concerned, that when the bill came to a second reading, upwards of *seven hundred* petitions were ready to be presented to the house of lords against its passing into law.

On this memorable day, earl Stanhope presented a petition against the bill, signed by upwards of two thousand persons; and he said, that, if the bill was pushed forwards, he had no doubt that the petitioners, instead of thousands would be *millions*. The earl of Liverpool said he was perfectly convinced that lord Sidmouth had been actuated by the purest and best motives in bringing forward the bill, and he was satisfied that the object of it had been very much misunderstood. It was, however, a consideration of great importance, whether the object sought to be attained was equivalent to the inconvenience arising from the agitation and alarm which had prevailed since the measure had been before the house. If there was any one subject more than another, in which he thought it impolitic for the legislature to interfere, without a real and absolute necessity, it was that of religion. However laudable the object of his noble friend might be, still it ought to be considered that the good to be derived from the change proposed was trifling; and that the inconvenience sustained by the agitation and alarm which prevailed was very great. Under these circumstances, he suggested to his noble friend the propriety of with-

drawing the bill. The petition presented by earl Stanhope was then ordered to lie on the table.

The petition from the deputies of the three denominations was presented by lord Holland, who stated that the persons who had signed it were the representatives of the great body of dissenters in and near the metropolis. A petition was presented by earl Grey, from the dissenting ministers in London and its vicinity. Another was presented by the marquis of Lansdowne, from persons residing in London to the number of nine hundred and sixty, many of whom, his lordship stated, were *members of the church of England*, and some of them *beneficed clergymen*, who felt the importance of preventing those dissensions which this measure, if persisted in, must unhappily occasion, and were anxious to live in peace and harmony with their fellow-subjects, the dissenters. Many other petitions were presented by lord Erskine and other peers, who had, at different times, advocated the cause of religious liberty. Hosts of auxiliaries were introduced without being obliged to take the oaths—petitions, coach loads of petitions, were presented on this occasion. “We could hardly shake hands with our fellow Peers,” said lord Holland, “from the number of petitions that entered against the bill.”

The multitudes of petitions having been introduced, and ordered to lie on the table, the order of the day was read for the second reading of the bill. Lord Sidmouth then rose, and expressed his regret at the misinterpretation, the misconception, and, he was afraid he must add, the misrepresentation, of the objects and provisions of the bill, which had gone abroad. The chief object of it, he contended, was merely to give a uniform sense to the toleration acts, and to prevent them from being differently construed in different counties. One of its principal objects, at the same time, was to prevent persons without any moral or intellectual qualifications from electing themselves to exercise one of the most important duties of man, the proper exercise of which was of incalculable moment; and, still further, to prevent persons from obtaining *licenses* as preachers and teachers, merely for the purpose of exempting themselves from those civil duties to which other persons were liable. After some further explanation, he observed that he was astonished at seeing resolutions advertised upon the subject in the

public papers, with the name of a member of parliament annexed to them, from whom he had been favoured with communications. In proposing the bill, he had not the remotest intention of infringing upon the acts of toleration. He rather wished to make the bill one of a comprehension, than one of exclusion; and if it was thought that its provisions tended to exclude any class of dissenters, he was most desirous that other provisions should be so framed as to include them. He urged their lordships to allow the bill to go into a committee, where, he was convinced, all the objections to it might be obviated. His lordship concluded by moving that the bill be now read a second time.

When dignified ecclesiastics step out of their usual road, and utter sentiments of a generous and enlightened nature, their names ought to be had in remembrance. It was a gratification to the friends of liberty, to have the doctrine of toleration so liberally expounded by the archbishop of Canterbury. The venerable primate, although satisfied that, if no infringement on the toleration act had been conceived, the bill would not have been so much opposed, and he was convinced that no such infringement was in reality intended. Although no persecution was intended, and although some misconception might exist on the subject, the torrent of petitions which had poured upon the table, ought to convince their lordships of the necessity of stopping short for the present. How much soever he might lament what he conceived to be the errors of protestant dissenters, it was to be recollected, that the BIBLE was the foundation of their belief, as well as that of the established church, and was, or might be, in the hands of every member of the empire; and it was also to be recollected, *that the best INTERPRETATIONS were but the interpretations of MEN, and that the best of men were liable to error.* As the dissenters had thought fit to oppose the present bill, they must be allowed to be the best judges of what is for their own interests. His grace, therefore, conceived that more injury than good would result from persisting in the measure; and thought it would be better not to press the bill against the opinions of the dissenters.

Lord Erskine said, that the evidence which they had received from the multiplicity of petitions which he had the honour

to present to the house against the bill, left no doubt as to the opinion entertained by the dissenters on the subject. But it was to be observed, that only a small part of the petitions had yet arrived ; and that if a longer time had been allowed, ten times the number would have been presented. If his noble friend would attend only for a few moments, he was confident that his lordship would approve of his recommending the second reading of the bill that day six months. He said he had no doubt of the purity of the motives by which the noble lord had been actuated in introducing the bill. Their lordships, however, would have imagined from the noble lord's discourse, that this bill was necessary to relieve the dissenters from errors and misconceptions, in their construction of statutes so justly called the palladium of British religious liberty. But the bill now before the house, lord Erskine said, was merely a declaratory act ; and what it declared was a direct infringement and contradiction both of the letter and spirit of the toleration act. He had formed his opinion after he had been asked by his noble friend to examine these statutes, before he knew that this bill would be opposed by the dissenters, and that he should have to present *two hundred and fifty* petitions against it. The act, he said, was a direct repeal of the most important parts of the toleration acts, as they had been uniformly explained for one hundred and twenty years ; and he believed that no court, and no judges in the country, would agree to the construction put on them by the noble lord. Would they suffer a bill then to pass, declaring that to be law which was not law ? It was necessary to look not only into the toleration act, but also into the intolerant statutes which preceded it. After adverting to some of these disgraceful acts, he wished to God they could all be buried in eternal oblivion ; and after showing the contradictions in the present bill against the acts of toleration, he asked, leaving the petitions out of the question, whether their lordships would make a declaration in the teeth of the law ?

Lord Holland maintained that every man had a right to preach, as well as print, what he conceived to be for the good of his fellow-creatures ; and that if he should injure the tranquillity of his country, he was liable to punishment : in the same manner as every man was entitled, without a license, to

carry arms, though it did not follow that he was entitled to employ them to the injury of others. If any person thought he knew the meaning of the Scriptures, it was his duty to communicate his opinions. He agreed with the celebrated Locke, that the toleration act was not a complete measure, but was merely the first step towards it.

Earl Stanhope said, he did not now rise to oppose the bill, because it had already received its death-wound. He hoped, however, it would be followed by a measure of a very different nature. Never, since he had been a member of parliament, had he received so much pleasure as this day, at observing the number of petitions, so numerously signed, which had been presented against this most wretched bill. The event had shown, that there was still a public opinion in the country, and that, when called into action, it could manifest itself speedily, and with effect. He was one of those who detested that act which they called the toleration act, because it did not go far enough. He hated the name of the toleration act. He hated the word toleration, as beggarly, narrow, worthless: it did not go far enough. He hated toleration, because he loved *liberty*. He believed he might say, that he was one of those who had read as many statutes on the subject of religion, not as the lawyers only, but, he might say, as my lords the bishops. He had gone through them with a professional man by his side; and with his pen had abstracted and marked off *three hundred laws about religion*; and he ventured to assert they were of such a nature, as would make their lordships disgusted with the statute-book, and ashamed of their ancestors who enacted them. An act, however, was passed in the first of Edward VI. (who might fairly be said to be the first protestant prince who had ever reigned in this country; for king Henry VIII., that "Defender of the Faith," could hardly be said to be a protestant) by which they were all shoveled away at once; and justly so: for what need had religion for acts of parliament? Was not religion capable of standing by itself? Was not America religious? Yet there was no established religion there. He gave notice that he should, early in the next session, introduce a bill in the place of that, of which he trusted they had seen the last glimpse that night, founded on the equitable principle which he had stated. To toleration, as it now existed

in this country, he was, as he had already said, a decided enemy: but, to *religious liberty*, he was the most decided friend, being convinced that no restraint should be put on religion, only so far as it might seem to endanger the state.

Earl Grey said, he could not allow the question to be put without declaring his unchangeable objection, both to the details and to the principle of the bill, to which no modifications could ever reconcile him. The principle of the bill was restraint—restraint vexatious and uncalled for. That it was a bill of restraint, even his noble friend, who introduced it, had not denied, or attempted to disguise. He was, however, against *all restraint*. He went along with his noble friend, lord Holland, in thinking, that every man who was impressed with the belief that he had a call to preach, ought to have every liberty allowed him so to do.

When, therefore, the sense of the house was taken, the bill was lost without a division. Such was the result of one of the most unpopular and impolitic, not to say unjust and oppressive measures, that had been laid before the parliament for many years. Thus we have related the prodigious and unprecedented efforts to resist this measure, with the success which crowned those exertions. They demonstrated that the spirit and principles of Englishmen still survived. They clearly indicated the number, the resources, the intellectual and moral importance of the friends of religious liberty. They displayed an instance, and afforded an example of zeal, which will never be forgotten.

This important failure occasioned unusual gratitude and satisfaction among all ranks of society. This remarkable triumph of liberal principles over spiritual bondage and slavery, inspired universal joy not only in the breasts of all denominations of dissenters, but among all liberal-minded Britons. The zealous advocates of religious impositions were exceedingly mortified and disappointed; for the government, by the earl of Liverpool, demonstrated before the highest assembly in the kingdom, its unwillingness to unite with them in binding its best friends in fetters, worse than fetters of iron. This impolitic measure included in it a kind of *veto* on the part of the crown in the appointment of dissenting ministers. It was properly considered as an attempt to fetter and oppress the conscience,

and was successfully resisted as an invasion of the rights of Christians.

Was it, indeed, possible that the act of toleration could have been misunderstood, as well by those who made it, as by all descriptions of people, for upwards of *one hundred and twenty years*? Can any thing be more evident than the spirit, or more clear than the letter, of that act? When will politicians learn the folly and odiousness of persecution? When will they understand that it is *every man's native right* to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience? Ought not the dreadful dissensions, the deadly feuds, the bloody wars, and and the final triumphs of religious liberty, to have taught men of all ranks this invaluable lesson—"Refrain from these men, and let them alone, for if this counsel, or this work be of men it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it?"

How wonderful are the ways of Providence! The enemies of religious freedom, by opposing Daniel and the three Hebrews, the faithful servants of God, injured themselves only, and promoted the cause which they intended to have destroyed. So the high ecclesiastics, whose heaps of letters armed the noble viscount in their cause, were equally foiled as their eastern predecessors, and the cause of religious liberty, which they sought to destroy, was promoted in the two houses of parliament, and through every corner of the empire. Some honourable exceptions were found in the highest stations. Landaff and Norwich, revered names! Watson and Bathurst enrolled themselves among the most ardent champions of religious liberty, and the best benefactors of the human race.

The government having openly testified its abhorrence of persecution, and of all further restraints on the rights of conscience, came forwards soon after, to extend the benefits of religious toleration. The failure of lord Sidmouth's bill, had afforded some ground to hope that the cause of religious freedom would be triumphant; that persecutors would be ashamed, and for ever hide their heads; that the pious people of the land would enjoy their privileges unmolested; that every man would be permitted to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience, and "sit under his vine and fig-tree, none daring to make him afraid." But, alas! this hope was falla-

cious. The spirit of intolerance revived ; and a new construction being put upon the toleration act, the patrons of oppression exerted themselves to effect that *without* law, which they had failed to accomplish by it. The magistrates in different parts of the kingdom, refused to administer the oaths, as formerly, to the ministers who applied, and in some instances they were treated with rudeness and contempt.

The dreadful outrages committed in various parts of the country created considerable alarm. Several important cases were brought before the court of King's Bench, and the decisions of the judges appeared to be contrary to any former interpretation of the toleration act. It was feared that the persecuting spirit of former ages was about to be revived. The toleration act, under which the various classes of dissenters had been so long fostered, could no longer afford protection. This state of things excited universal interest ; the minds of the people, both in the church and out of it, were greatly agitated ; and it was deemed absolutely necessary, that some decisive steps should be taken, for the better security of the invaluable rights of conscience. Immediate application was, therefore, made to the prince regent's ministers, for the repeal of several old and obsolete acts, and for the unequivocal establishment of those privileges which all parties had hitherto considered as secured to the dissenters by the tolerant acts already in force. The court ministers cordially espoused the cause, and a new act of toleration passed the two houses of parliament and obtained the royal assent.

This new act absolutely repeals the Five Mile and Conventicle acts, and another of a most offensive kind against the quakers. It then proceeds to relieve from the penalties of the several acts mentioned in former tolerant acts, all protestants who resort to a congregation allowed by the acts there referred to. As under the old toleration act, so also by this, all places of worship must be *certified* to the proper court ; but by the former only *five persons* could meet together, in addition to a man's own family, without having the place registered ; whereas by this, the number is extended to *twenty*. By the former act, no person was allowed to preach till he had taken the oaths ; by this act, any person may preach without having taken the oaths : and he is merely liable to be called upon to

take them once, if he be *required in writing from a justice of the peace*. By the old toleration acts, persons were obliged to attend the quarter sessions to take the oaths; by this act, any person may take them before one justice only; and in no case can such person be compelled to *travel upwards of five miles* for that purpose. By the *new construction* put upon the toleration act, only particular persons could insist upon taking the oaths; by this act, any *protestant* may *require* a justice to administer the oaths, and grant a certificate. The toleration act did not provide for the punishment of riotous persons who did not come *within* the place of worship, by which many congregations were greatly disturbed by noises made on the *outside*; but, by this act, any person who shall wilfully and maliciously disturb a congregation, whether within or without the place, shall incur a penalty of *forty pounds*, which penalty is double to that imposed by the former act.

The progress of religious freedom did not stop here. The blessing of toleration had been extended to those who denied the doctrine of the Trinity, but who, to this time, had been tolerated only by the liberality of their countrymen, and not by law. The act which secured this additional privilege is entitled, “An act to relieve persons who impugn the doctrine of the holy Trinity from certain penalties.” Therefore, in the year 1813, Mr. William Smith succeeded in that important object which Mr. Fox had laboured so hard, but utterly failed to accomplish.

Thus we see, that, though party prejudice raged with uncommon fury, the dissenters not only enjoyed protection and peace, but had many considerable additional privileges secured to them by legal statute. To the honour of the English government it must be openly stated, that their religious liberties not only continued unimpaired, but increased; and the shield of protection was steadily held over their heads to preserve them from injury. The peculiar excellence of the British constitution, and the dignity of mind with which the ministry acted on these occasions, deserve both our gratitude and praise. They had the consolation to observe, that the design of the friends of religious liberty was far remote from every thing of a political nature, and had religion *alone* for its object and its end.

The principles of religious freedom, however, admit of no qualification on the ground of human policy. Much praise is unquestionably due to the administration under our late venerable monarch and the prince regent, for the practical defence of the rights of conscience which they so repeatedly manifested. The advocates of Christian freedom were indebted to the general spirit of the age, and to the enlightened policy of their rulers, not only for the removal of many penal disabilities, but for a more general recognition of their claims as subjects, and as Christians. But it is a dangerous mistake to conclude that, in this country, religious liberty is under no restraint. In addition to the civil disabilities under which a considerable portion of British subjects still remain on the score of their religious belief, the amended act of toleration contains enactments essentially infringing on religious liberty.

Every master of a house in which more than twenty persons, exclusive of the family, shall be assembled for no other purpose than the *worship of Almighty God*, may incur, as the statute now stands, a fine of *twenty pounds*; and a person *preaching* in such an assembly may be fined to the same amount. This penalty will be incurred in all cases when the house or building is not registered. Can this be deemed just? Why should the worship of God, under *any circumstances*, be considered as a penal transaction? In other cases where far more numerous bodies are assembled, no such restriction exists. No fine can be levied on the master of a house, if he invite fifty or five hundred of his acquaintance to unite with his family in an entertainment, a dinner, or a supper. No penalty is exacted of a person who fills his house with men and women at a concert or a ball. The largest rooms at a tavern may be crowded with company, and no pecuniary fine attaches to the proprietor or the guests. Why then should *religious services*, which are presented to Almighty God, be deemed more obnoxious in the eye of the law than proceedings of this description? Why should religion and the worship of God then be the only things to which danger or criminality is attached? So much error and delusion could never have existed, if the various denominations of Christians had derived their principles from the New Testament, and founded their respective churches on apostolic truth. Such taxing and punishing men on the

score of their religion is the most dangerous fanaticism—the worst kind of monkery—the most disgraceful to a protestant country.

The new act of toleration, 52 Geo. III. enacts, “That from and after the passing of this act no congregation or assembly for religious worship of protestants shall be *permitted or allowed*, unless, &c.” This language clearly implies that the religious worship of protestants is considered as depending on the will of the legislature. It imports not the *absolute right* of protestants to worship God in a way which appears to them acceptable to him, but suspends their public worship of God on the favourable inclination of those in power. Throughout this act there is not a single expression acknowledging the exclusive religious rights and obligations of all mankind. The original toleration act concedes “some ease to scrupulous consciences;” and the new act assumes mere expediency as the ground of its provisions. An act of parliament *permitting* and *allowing* the members of a family to have intercourse with each other, how strange soever it would appear, would be equally consistent with unalienable right, as an act permitting and allowing protestants, or any other denomination, to assemble for the purpose of holding intercourse with God. An act of parliament permitting and allowing men to enjoy the light of the sun, or to breathe the air in which they live, could not be more absurd than that which professedly permits and allows them under certain restrictions to believe the Gospel and worship the Creator.

If men injure others in their person, reputation, or estates, let the offenders be punished. “If it be a matter of wrong or of lewdness,” let it be brought before the judge; but let not inoffensive and commendable conduct be charged with criminality and visited with punishment. This, however, is manifestly provided by the toleration act as recently modified; and this circumstance alone, independent of all other facts and arguments, affords sufficient proof that human legislation in matters of religion is repugnant to the unrestricted rights of conscience.

Liberty of religion is the birthright of man. It is a precious inheritance given him by his Creator, and is inseparably connected with his rational constitution. Not only has every

man an indubitable right to the use of his intellectual powers on all points and duties in theology, but God has created him under indispensable obligations to claim and exercise that right. We can no more release ourselves, than we can be released by others, from the most awful responsibility to God, for the employment of our understandings and consciences, on all subjects connected with our faith and salvation. To deny that we are to judge for ourselves in such matters, is to deny our obligation to our Maker, especially since we cannot be answerable for opinions not our own ; but those who take from us this responsibility, would surely tremble to answer for us at the tribunal of God. Or if they were rash enough to do this, we are not weak enough to trust them : we know that “ *every one* of us shall give account of *himself* to God.” If, therefore, every man enjoy an undoubted right to believe the Gospel, and to worship God, no man or body of men can possibly have any right to forbid, or license, or interrupt him.

Jesus Christ has the sole supremacy and legislative authority over the faith and consciences of men. He has, accordingly, favoured them with the unrestricted use of the Bible, as the only rule of religious belief and obedience. By an unshaken attachment to these principles, we testify our allegiance to Christ, and our steadfastness in his cause. This unlimited religious freedom is in no respect dangerous to the state. To the civil government of our country we pay the most cheerful obedience, not of mere duty, but of choice, in all civil matters ; yet we are bound to “ render unto God the things that are God’s.” We respect and honour the pious and worthy members of every Christian church ; we are their ready coadjutors in the numerous works of patriotic and Christian philanthropy. It is a part of the respect we feel for other denominations to declare *why* we are constrained to differ from them and submit the whole to their cool and unbiassed consideration.

We rejoice that the established church is purified from many of the grosser errors of the Romish communion : but we lament that she still retains an unscriptural conformity in many points of doctrine, constitution, and worship. We especially lament that her *constitution* involves a denial, virtually at least, of the FUNDAMENTAL principle of protestantism—the right of private judgment ; and that she is tied and bound with the iron fetters

of an uncatholic *uniformity*, originally imposed by the most profligate prince of the house of Stuart ;—so tied and bound with those heavy chains, that all melioration of her woes, are, to her, doleful and forbidden sounds.

Christian faith and worship cannot be the subject of prohibitory laws founded on a pure basis. The demands of religion can never be satisfied but by an entire release from every disabling and penal statute. In this unclouded and unembarrassed state alone, religion displays her spotless majesty. Loosened from the bonds of human traditions and secular institutions, she walks at large, and appears in her true character—a visitor from heaven among the children of men :—to guide their erring steps, to enlighten their beclouded minds, to purify their depraved affections, to make them great by conferring on them a holy immortality, conducting them in her amiable and lovely train to celestial rest and peace.

SECTION II.

The Prevalence of Religious Liberty.

It is with sensations of unfeigned thankfulness to God, that in the spirit of our happy constitution, and in the general execution of our laws, so much regard was paid, during the reign of his late venerable majesty, to the just principles of Christian freedom. The nature of civil and religious liberty must be ill understood in that state, which would force upon man a religion which his mind has not examined, and his heart does not approve ; or would restrain him from the public profession and open avowal of a faith which he has adopted from conviction and choice. It is a right with which God has invested all rational men, not only to think and believe for themselves, but also, without the fear of persecution or molestation, to avow the result of their convictions on all religious subjects.

This is one of the plainest maxims of Christianity ; and so long as men claim this right, and feel conscious of their responsibility to God, they cannot possibly receive, as an act of grace or favour from man, the liberty of presenting their prayers and

thanksgivings unto God. If there were a country in which it was the custom to put out the eyes of every fifth or tenth person, we should certainly feel grateful to providence for casting our lot in a land where all persons were allowed the use of their sight; but it would be difficult to persuade us, that the government under which we lived had any right to deprive us of the use of vision, or that it performed any meritorious act of grace and toleration, by allowing us the free use of our eyes. All men have an equal right to the exercise of their faith and religious worship, as they have to the use of their eyes, the light of the sun, the rain from the clouds, or the air they breathe.

The patrons of liberty have always exercised a firm reliance on the parental care of his late revered majesty; who, in his first speech from the throne, made this enlightened declaration:—"The peculiar happiness of my life will ever consist in promoting the welfare of a people, whose loyalty and warm affection to me, I consider as the greatest and most permanent supports of my throne; and I doubt not but their steadiness to those principles will equal the firmness of my invariable resolution TO MAINTAIN THE TOLERATION INVIOLEABLE. The civil and RELIGIOUS RIGHTS OF MY LOVING SUBJECTS ARE EQUALLY DEAR TO ME AS THE MOST VALUABLE PREROGATIVE OF MY CROWN; and, as the surest foundation of the whole, and the best means to draw down the divine favour on my reign, IT IS MY FIXED PURPOSE TO COUNTENANCE AND ENCOURAGE THE PRACTICE OF TRUE RELIGION AND VIRTUE." This declaration of our late amiable and beloved sovereign was religiously fulfilled throughout his protracted reign.

We cannot help considering the illustrious house of Hanover as raised up by divine Providence for the protection of our laws and our liberties. Nor must George the Third be reckoned one of the least among them. Let the principles and conduct of his long reign be compared with those of the tyrannical and cruel Henry the Eighth, the bloody and insatiable Mary, the arbitrary and bigoted Elizabeth, the vain and contemptible James the First, the despotic and oppressive Charles the First, the hypocritical and profligate Charles the Second, the sanguinary and bigoted measures of James the Second, or the intriguing and persecuting measures of Anne: and he will appear to great advantage. None of these odious qualities ap-

peared in **GEORGE THE THIRD**. We have, therefore, the strongest reason to adore the Providence of God for his long and eventful reign.

No small tribute of praise was due to the British monarch for his liberal and friendly treatment of the various denominations of Christians belonging to the royal household, who never suffered the smallest diminution of favour on account of their religious tenets, but his majesty took great pains so to accommodate them that they might attend their own places of religious worship without molestation. The same praise being justly due to the younger branches of the royal family, entitled them to the highest respect, for their distinguished liberality towards their domestics and dependents, and for paying, on all occasions, so just a regard to the rights of conscience. It is recorded of the duke of York, that as chief commander of the English army, he issued an order in 1802, that no soldier in the British service should be compelled to attend at a place of worship which he did not approve, or be prevented from attending that which he did approve. If many persons in the higher and middle ranks of society, who persecute their tenants and dependents on account of their religious profession, were to cultivate the spirit, and follow the example of their superiors, they would appear to society in a view far more dignified and honourable: but, narrow souls! refusing the most salutary instruction, they degrade themselves by the contemptible bigotry of Carthusian monks.

When men control the religion of their dependents, they are guilty of an open insult on common decency, and of a flagrant violation of Christianity. They are, perhaps, zealous advocates for the abolition of the slavery of injured Africans; but exercise the worst kind of despotism and inflict the worst kind of slavery on their fellow Christians! They would break the galling fetters from insulted and degraded Negroes; but would bind the understandings and consciences of Englishmen in fetters of iron! These narrow-minded fanatics, calling themselves Christians, are petty tyrants over the souls of Christians, and, on this account, are guilty of the most hateful crime that can exist. Their conduct is founded in ignorance, absurdity, injustice and cruelty, by attempting to rob men of the rights and privileges given them by their Creator. Is this obeying

the apostolic injunction, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind?" Were the case reversed, and they treated thus by others, how would they like such unnatural and cruel usage—usage which savage barbarians would be ashamed to inflict.

By the assumption of this lofty and erroneous superiority, and by the exercise of this restriction and coercion, they degrade Christianity to the very dregs of Paganism; and, though they call themselves its warmest friends, they place themselves among its greatest enemies. That religion which requires such antichristian measures for its protection and support, cannot, without the grossest perversion of language, be called the religion of Jesus Christ. The men who promote religion by such odious measures, are enemies to mankind, disturbers of the peace of society, and subverters of Christianity: being unwilling to go to heaven themselves, they ought not to control and hinder those that would.

The voluntary association of any denomination of Christians for the public worship of God, and for the ministration of the Gospel, are supreme advantages to society, unspeakable blessings to the nation, and incalculably beneficial to the temporal and eternal welfare of the people. These Christian societies, founded on apostolic truth, deserve the favour and encouragement of all ranks of men; and, to the honour of Britain, they enjoy the sanction and protection of the state. But when men are guilty of molesting and coercing the religion of their dependents, they not only betray extreme weakness, and great wickedness, but prove themselves to be enemies to the laws and government of their country, which allow and secure to every man that which they endeavour to subvert and destroy.

With these degrading exceptions, religious liberty, prevailed, during this reign, much more than at any former period. Many persons of every order and every rank have renounced their former narrowness of mind, and allowed every man to pursue the religion of his choice. We have lived to see the day when restraints in religion and conscience are accounted by many as the worst kind of oppression and degradation. Some there are who admit the rights of conscience in *theory*, but, with disgraceful inconsistency, refuse them in *practice*; and some claiming the right of private judgment for themselves, deny it to others. With these odious and debasing exceptions,

a goodly number of persons there are who not only claim this unspeakable gift of God, but most cordially allow it to all men. This is that erect posture which all ought to maintain, both as men and as Christians.

Various occurrences, towards the close of this period, successively contributed to produce this liberalized state of mind, and honourable Christian practice. The formation of numerous benevolent institutions for the melioration of human misery, and the diffusion of Christian knowledge, greatly aided this good cause. The amazing efforts and success of missionary societies, and Bible societies, with many other important institutions for the propagation of Christianity at home and abroad, brought the various denominations of Christians nearer together, inspired them with clearer apprehensions, and produced in their minds a new and improved tone of feeling. While men of all ranks and all parties united in friendly and zealous co-operation to promote almost innumerable objects of charity and humanity, they felt their deep-rooted prejudices giving way ; and, without sacrificing one religious principle, or renouncing one amiable feeling, they have begun to relinquish the corroding humours of bigotry and intolerance. Having cultivated the spirit of true philanthropy, and cherished the amiable graces of Christianity, their cankered tempers and angry passions have been softened ; they felt the sweets of loving one another as brethren ; and, to their utter astonishment, they were constrained to allow men the liberty of professing and promoting the religion of their own choice ! Those extraordinary efforts which have been made by all parties, to promulgate the Gospel and extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ among the benighted heathen, while they originated in, and were founded upon, the claims of religious liberty, had a powerful effect in liberalizing their own minds ; and while they found it to be equally irrational and impossible to transport their peculiar hierarchies and party prejudices to heathen lands, they have conducted their pious operations in foreign countries, as well as at home, on the broad basis of religious freedom : so that all parties are compelled, almost in spite of themselves, to allow mankind perfect liberty to embrace and propagate the religion of Jesus Christ.

Under this honourable and improved tone of feeling, bene-

volent Christians have sent missionaries and Bibles to almost every Pagan land, while multitudes of ministers and private Christians became, at the same time, deeply sensible of their obligations to diffuse the knowledge of Christ more extensively in their own country : so that more general and more vigorous exertions have been made through every part of the empire, and, in hundreds of small towns and villages, new places of worship have been opened under the protection of the legislative toleration. That these generous efforts in the cause of God, and for the immortal interests of men, should have roused the baser passions of certain enemies of religion, and have excited suspicion in their unhallowed breasts, that some deep political design, dangerous to the state, lay concealed under so much religious zeal, was very natural to suppose ; and that these enemies to God and to souls, should send their reiterated accusations to the government, was only to be expected : but the fact, upon examination, was found to be the opposite of their representations ; their groundless jealousy has been confounded ; and the wrath of man has been overruled for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and for the wide extension of liberality and moderation.

The diversified obstructions to the progress of religious freedom, as detailed in the foregoing section, especially the last great struggle for the overthrow of lord Sidmouth's bill, greatly contributed to aid the minds of all classes to assert and claim their native rights. The unrestricted discussions in the parliament and from the press, opened and enlarged the minds of thousands, who now began to say, that their souls were their own ; and who dared to employ their intellectual powers, for their own benefit and the benefit of mankind. Splendid titles lost much of their former terror, and real worth of character was considered as the only criterion of true dignity. Religion being stripped of its mystery, men of different opinions have been brought into closer contact, consequently, to greater friendship. Bishops and priests may be conversed with upon terms of familiarity ; their opinions doubted and freely controverted. The human mind, which, for many generations, had been debased by superstition, and enslaved by priestcraft, at length burst its fetters, and asserted its real dignity.

The erection of public schools for the education of the lower

orders of society, in almost every town and village of the united kingdom, greatly assisted in the moral and religious improvement of the poor, diffusing light and truth, benevolence and liberty, through every corner of the land. A spirit of emulation roused every commendable zeal among the various denominations of Christians ; and while thus employing their active benevolence to promote the reputation and happiness of the rising generation, the progress of religious melioration could not fail to be one of its happiest results. These charitable and honourable institutions are sometimes founded on the principles of exclusion, and breathe the stagnant air of sectarian bigotry ; but, though placed in these unpropitious circumstances, so far as they disperse darkness, and aid the cause of mental improvement, the consequences must be favourable, eventually, to the advancement of religious truth and liberty of conscience. In the history of nations, especially of our own country, ignorance, superstition, and barbarism have invariably nourished and promoted mental slavery ; so the instruction of the ignorant, and the general diffusion of useful knowledge, will sooner or later break these odious fetters, and set captive souls at liberty.

His majesty's affectionate solicitude for the happiness of his subjects, at home and abroad, was clearly displayed in numerous instances ; and when persecution arose in any extreme parts of the empire, he invariably asserted his prerogative to redress the grievances of his subjects ; and always peremptorily refused to recognise the colonial laws in the West Indies, which at all infringed on the existing toleration. This will appear from the following instances. The legislature of the island of St. Vincent, in the year 1792, passed an act " that no person, except the regular clergy, should preach without a license from them, not to be granted to any who had not previously resided for twelve months on the island." For the first offence the punishment was a fine of ten Iohannies, or imprisonment. For the second, such punishment as the court should think proper to inflict, with banishment ; and, on return from banishment, the punishment was death !! Were the edicts of the Pagan emperors more severe than this ? But the year following, his majesty, in council, was graciously pleased to disannul this cruel act, and thus restored liberty to his persecuted subjects in that remote corner of the empire.

His majesty's subjects met with similar treatment in Jamaica; but, in several instances, he graciously interfered, particularly in the year 1809, and checked that spirit of intolerance and persecution which had there so long prevailed. The legislature of Jamaica had a *second* time silenced the missionaries sent out by different religious societies in this country, who had been labouring with the happiest success among the negroes and others in that island. In contempt of his majesty's express disallowance of their first persecuting edict, they passed another similar act, but with restrictions still more comprehensive, and which in effect precluded all teachers, except the established clergy, from attempting to instruct the poor miserable negroes. The consequence was, that these oppressed fellow-creatures, composing nine-tenths of the population, were left destitute of religious instruction and the worship of God; for the few resident clergy neither did, nor could, extend their pastoral labours beyond the white inhabitants.

The insular legislature knowing that this unrighteous measure would be disapproved by the king, resorted to the trick of ingrafting it upon an act to continue the general system of the slave laws, which had been consolidated into a temporary act just expiring. Their agent, therefore, represented, that if the act of continuation was disallowed, the island would be destitute of all slave laws, and dreadful confusion would follow. But the committee of his majesty's privy-council for the plantations, after a full discussion, detected and frustrated this shameful artifice, by disallowing, as they advised his majesty, both the act in question, and the act of repeal; which, though it had been several years in force, had never received his majesty's approbation. By this means the general slave laws were re-established, and only the persecuting clauses of the act, in effect, annulled.

The Jamaica legislature, by the previous stratagem of delaying to transmit their act for the royal assent, while it had an unrestricted operation on the island, had, for more than a year, suspended the progress of missions and their religious worship, together with all the instructions afforded by the missionaries, to the obvious discouragement of their pious labours, as well as to the great prejudice of numerous converts recently made, but now in danger of relapsing to Pagan darkness and abominations.

To prevent a repetition of these intolerant proceedings in that or any other island, the king was graciously pleased to issue a general order to the West India governors, requiring and commanding that they should not, on any pretence whatever, give their sanction to any law relating to religion, until they had first transmitted the draught of the bill to his majesty, and had received his pleasure respecting it; unless they took care, in passing such a law, that a clause should be inserted, suspending its execution till his majesty's pleasure should be obtained.

This was an event of the utmost importance in the annals of religious liberty. The disposition of his venerable majesty towards his protestant dissenting subjects was clearly and decisively ascertained. The intelligence of these public measures flew like lightning through the united kingdom; and made an indelible impression on all liberal minds. The cause of religious liberty was publicly sanctioned and promoted from the throne.

This signal conquest of liberality over intolerance was followed, only four years after, by another event of the greatest magnitude and importance to the promotion of Christianity. The renewal of the East India company's charter, roused the generous energies and zealous co-operation of all denominations of Christians in the empire; and upon the public discussions in the two houses of parliament, petitions were sent up and presented from all parts of the united kingdom, for liberty to disseminate Christian truth, and promote Christian worship, through the vast population of India. To give a proper tone and impulse to public sentiment, meetings were immediately called, and the most prompt resolutions adopted, in all the principal cities and towns, and by all the missionary societies in the kingdom, openly declaring the great interest they felt in the proceedings of the two houses. A numerous and respectable meeting of persons favourable to this great object was held in the metropolis, and the following resolutions, with some others, were unanimously adopted:

“That this meeting does most cordially concur in the resolution of the honourable house of commons, in the year 1793 — ‘That it is the particular and bounden duty of the legislature to promote, by all just and prudent means, the interest

and happiness of the inhabitants of the British dominions in India; and that, for these ends, such measures ought to be adopted as may gradually tend to their advancement in useful knowledge, and to their religious and moral improvement.'

"That this meeting, coinciding as it does in these just and humane sentiments, persuaded as well of the political wisdom as of the religious duty of giving them effect, and lamenting that so little should have hitherto been done to that end, feels it to be a sacred obligation to exert itself to the utmost of its power, in order to procure such provisions in the new charter to be granted to the East India company, as may afford an opening for the gradual communication, by safe and prudent means, of our superior religious light and social improvements; and more especially such as shall afford sufficient opportunities to those benevolent persons who shall be desirous of going to India for these purposes; and also such provisions as shall prevent the obstruction of their endeavours for promoting their objects in that country, so long as they shall conduct themselves in a peaceable and orderly manner.

"That although this meeting has reason to hope that his majesty's government is favourably disposed to the principles asserted in the preceding resolutions, yet as the terms of the renewal of the East India company's charter are now the subject of discussion in parliament, and all the conflicting interests and opinions involved in those discussions are supported by petitions from all parts of the kingdom, it is the sense of this meeting, that petitions to both houses of parliament, from persons anxious to obtain and willing to promote the religious, moral, and civil improvement of the inhabitants of India, will be seasonable and proper."

These liberal and benevolent propositions were supported by persons of the first respectability belonging to the two houses of parliament. At an earlier stage of this business, by a special meeting of the committee of "The Protestant Society for the Protection of Religious Liberty," the following resolutions were adopted:

"That this committee, including members of the national church, and representing many hundred congregations of protestant dissenters in England and Wales, of all denominations, must primarily exert their vigilance and energy for the protec-

tion of religious freedom within the united kingdom ; but that principle and sympathy must equally impel them to approve, to desire, and, if possible, to obtain the enjoyment of that liberty in every part of the British empire throughout the world.

“ That as men, as Britons, and as Christians, this committee continue to regard with anguish the moral depression and religious ignorance of very many millions of immortal beings, who people the plains of India, subject to British power ;—that their hearts are pained at the fearful penances, licentious rites, female degradation, human sacrifices, and horrid infanticide which there prevail ;—and that convinced by history, observation, and experience, that Christianity would afford inestimable benefits, and that its diffusion is practicable, wise, and imperative, they cannot but persevere eminently to desire its speedy and universal promulgation throughout the regions of the east.

“ That they esteem the power, possessed and exercised by the East India company, to prohibit Christian missionaries from residing within the vast dominions under their control, as the greatest impediment which has recently existed to the progress of Christianity in India, and as inconsistent with the religious freedom which this committee must invariably defend.

“ That although this committee deprecate and abhor any intolerant interference, either with Mahomedans or Hindoos, and do not advocate any ecclesiastical establishment, they must continue strenuously to contend, that, on the renewal of a charter to the East India company, their former powers of exclusion should not be renewed ; but that Christians of every sect should be permitted, unlicensed, to explain and peaceably to promulgate throughout India the holy religion which they profess, and should enjoy the equal protection of the state.

“ That, to effectuate a result which they deem interesting and most desirable, this committee will renew their application to his majesty’s government, and entreat their interposition and assistance—will, if necessary, express their wishes by petitions to both houses of parliament—and will, by the public avowal of their sentiments, endeavour to excite the attention of the benevolent and the pious to an object deserving of their best consideration and support.”

The committee having renewed their application to his ma-

jesty's government, obtained an interview with the earl of Liverpool, the first lord of the treasury, and the earl of Buckinghamshire, president of the commissioners for the affairs of India. At this interview, great attention and urbanity were displayed; the deputation firmly asserted the principle of *right* which their committee had always avowed, and suggested a plan by which that right might be recognised, and by which the East India company and the government would still have possessed the power of supervision, by which the abuse of that right would have been prevented. The justice of their principles was acknowledged, but the expediency and practicability of acting upon them in the intercourse with India were as firmly denied. The deputation were however informed, "That his majesty's government considered the gradual introduction of Christianity into India as beneficent and wise; that they thought it disgraceful to this country that such neglect of the religious improvement of the Hindoos had so long continued; and that it was their intention, because it was equally their *inclination* and their *duty*, to adopt all measures which prudence would sanction to terminate that disgrace. That they, therefore, designed to propose to parliament, that the present exclusive powers of the East India company should no longer exist, but that the government should be empowered to grant permission to pious men of every sect to visit and reside in India, subject to no further restrictions than would be imposed on the few persons whose residence for commercial purposes they might also permit. That although discretion would be vested in the existing government, yet that they would be responsible to public opinion and to parliament for any refusals they might offer to those who should apply; that a legislative enactment of the nature which they proposed would be declaratory of the opinion of parliament; that all prudent facilities should be afforded to the christianization of India; and that no obstacles ought to be capriciously interposed to the progress of an object which all good and wise men must unite to desire." His majesty's ministers, at the close of this interview, promised to communicate to the committee any clauses which might be introduced, and to receive with attention any alterations conformable to their principles which the committee might suggest.

This friendly interview, with these open assurances, could not fail to make a favourable impression on the minds of the committee ; while, at the same time, it displayed that high degree of respectability and liberality with which his majesty's government was conducted. The committee of this society afterwards presented their petition to the house of commons, containing the following important clauses :

“ That your petitioners would not implore the introduction even of benefits so great, and the performance of a duty so manifest, by compulsory efforts, inconsistent with religious liberty, and the mild and genuine spirit of the religion they profess.—That they would hope to attain their wishes by the residence, and gratuitous, disinterested exertions of pious men, who, exercising their undoubted and unalienable birthright, and obeying obligations which they esteem most sacred, would be induced by a pure philanthropy to visit and improve regions so neglected and remote ; and who, excluding themselves from secular employments, would devote their lives to the conciliation of the affections of the natives, and to the improvement of their minds.—That your petitioners are convinced, from the respect which former missionaries have obtained, and from the numbers who, at different periods, have forsaken their native idolatry, and adopted the Christian faith, that such efforts would not excite any consequences prejudicial to the security of British power—would strengthen and consolidate that authority, by securing confidence and obtaining esteem—and would be consistent with that liberal policy which wise and good men in every age have delighted to commend.—That your petitioners have, therefore, deplored the possession by the East India company of the power to exclude religious instructors from that extensive empire ; and especially from motives which your petitioners deem inaccurate in principle, and practically inexpedient, that company have since the last renewal of their charter, not only asserted, but continued to exercise that power. Your petitioners therefore hope, that if the charter of the East India company should be renewed, the power which has retarded improvement, and which necessity does not enjoin, will be no longer permitted to exist.—But your petitioners humbly pray, that your honourable house will be pleased to adopt such measures as to its wisdom shall

seem meet, to enable British born subjects, after the expiration of the present charter of the East India company, at their own charges, to visit and reside in any part of the Eastern possessions of his majesty, for the sole purpose of instructing the inhabitants of those countries in useful knowledge, and in the Christian faith."

The discussions on the new charter in the two houses, formed a very important epocha in the annals of religious freedom. The great question to be decided was, whether *fifty millions* of subjects in British India, involved in the most deplorable idolatry and other vices, should receive their religious instruction wholly under the arbitrary direction and control of their civil governors; or Christians of every class, being British subjects, should have liberty to afford them all the instruction in their power, so long as they continued obedient to the civil authority? The question, as was anticipated, met with no inconsiderable opposition, especially in the commons; but it was so admirably supported by the noble energies of truth and justice, while the overwhelming torrents of petitions which poured in from all parties, and from all quarters, proclaimed aloud the opinion of a great people, that all this opposition was overcome.

The bill favouring liberty having passed the commons, was carried up to the lords, where again it was supported by similar energies, and again accompanied by multitudes of petitions. Lord Erskine, having presented a number of petitions from Hampshire, addressed the house with his usual eloquence and good sense; and insisted on the indispensable duty of Britain to promulgate the Christian faith, by all just and prudent means, to the utmost boundaries of her empire. "Do not forget, my lords," said he, "that this country holds her Indian provinces by the sole tenure of Christianity; and, if she neglect to impart its blessings, which we enjoy in a superior degree, she may lose them; and that tremendous storm, which has burst upon Europe, from which we have mercifully escaped, that we might propagate the Christian faith, may cross the channel and fall on our own guilty heads."

Lord Holland, the constant advocate of unconfined liberty of conscience, presented a number of petitions from Cornwall and the island of Jersey; and declared his strong approbation of the clause introduced by the government; particularly as it

contained a legislative recognition of the rights of conscience in those benevolent persons, who might conscientiously feel it to be their duty to seek the conversion and salvation of our Hindoo subjects, whose religious rights, he was happy to perceive, were at the same time secured. The bill having passed the house, the next day received the royal assent.

This legislative enactment recognised that religious freedom which is the birthright of mankind, and allowed Christianity to rest on its only proper foundation—to be supported by its own strength, and to be promulgated on the sole basis of its own excellence. By this memorable statute, therefore, *fifty millions* of people, not home-born, but foreign subjects under the British government, were placed in actual possession of liberty of conscience; and this liberty was permanently secured to those British subjects who might be disposed to leave their native shores, to promote the salvation of the idolatrous Hindoos. Thus was accomplished one of the noblest objects that ever animated the zeal of the Christian world.

This memorable conquest of liberty over latent and powerful opposition, is to be ascribed both to the government and the people. We have noticed the generous principles and concessions of the court ministers. The sentiments of the people were explicitly stated in upwards of *nine hundred* petitions, presented to the two houses of parliament, containing the names of about *half a million* of the population of the three kingdoms. On this important occasion, churchmen and dissenters mutually and zealously united in promoting the great cause of religious emancipation; and they all rejoiced in the happy and beneficial result. These were the remarkable efforts and success of the various denominations of Christians, to the unspeakable joy of all people.

Another event of great interest and importance to all true protestants, which called into active operation the sympathy and liberality of British Christians, was the merciless and bloody persecution of the protestants in the south of France. This mournful event made a deep impression on all liberal-minded Englishmen, and roused their concern for the cause of religious liberty in a foreign land. These tragic scenes cannot fail to impress the mind of every pious reader. “Our children, our property, our churches, and our local comforts,”

said one on the spot, "all appeared to be at stake. Protestants trembled with dark suspicions concerning their neighbours;—the horrors of assassination, massacre, and extirpation, whether sleeping or waking, were continually before our eyes. Superstition and fanaticism, taking advantage of this alarm, came forth from the tombs, where for twenty-five years they had been concealed; and, alas! were once more permitted, by a mysterious providence, to re-kindle their expiring torches, and march through the kingdom, spreading terror and devastation on every side." The persecutors marked their victims; they plundered and murdered as their fury directed, wherever they found protestant property and protestant faith; and protestants *alone* were their victims.

Sir Samuel Romilly, describing these shocking barbarities in the house of commons, said—"The houses of the protestants were pulled down, and their furniture was burnt; the rich were laid under severe contribution, and the lower orders exposed to the utmost cruelties. The greater part of these unfortunate people were manufacturers. Their persecutors destroyed their looms and all their implements of industry, knowing that by this proceeding they should totally deprive them of all means of subsistence. Houses and manufactories were totally destroyed, vineyards laid waste, and the vines torn up by the roots. Many females were exposed in the streets to every species of insult—one woman in particular, who was scourged in a most brutal manner, was known to be far advanced in pregnancy. The instruments which were used in this torture were not of the ordinary kind—small pieces of iron and small nails were fastened to the scourge by which these people were torn. Thirty women had been scourged, every one of whom had died in consequence. He was certain," he said, "that he should be within the real numbers when he asserted, that in those dreadful scenes, *two hundred women* had been murdered, and nearly *two thousand men*; and *three hundred and fifty houses* were destroyed! Some of these outrages were attended with circumstances so horrid as would appear almost incredible that they should be suffered to pass with impunity in any civilized country."

The friends of humanity and religious freedom in England, could not receive the melancholy intelligence from time to time,

without feeling the most pungent sorrow and concern for the professors of the reformed religion in France. "With these awful facts before us," say they, "we could not mistake in deciding, that it was our duty to give a distinct and public expression of our sentiments—to use our influence with the government of our country—and to demonstrate to our distressed brethren in France our sympathy and regard, by contributing according to our ability for their temporal relief." An extraordinary meeting of the ministers of the three denominations was convened in London, when, nearly one hundred ministers being assembled, a deputation from the body was appointed to confer with his majesty's government, and to request their good offices with the court of France for the liberty and protection of the afflicted protestants in that country. The conference was accordingly obtained; and the strongest assurances were given by the earl of Liverpool of the deep regret experienced by the prince regent's ministers, at the horrid scenes which had been lately witnessed in France, and of their disposition to use their utmost efforts for the support of the freedom of religious faith and worship.

This friendly interposition was seasonable, and not without effect. Their sympathy for the persecuted and distressed led them to make a public and direct appeal to the charity and benevolence of the religious public, when, to the honour of the dissenters, collections were transmitted from nearly all their congregations in the kingdom: some churchmen, also, the friends of humanity and toleration, had their names and their donations enrolled among those of their dissenting brethren. The sum raised was very considerable, and opportunely distributed; while it was most thankfully and joyfully received. The munificent exertions of these Christian philanthropists, are thus described by one who cannot be suspected of partiality to any of the three denominations: "This intervention was the calm commanding voice of a great people, lifted up against persecutors, and claiming kindred with the persecuted. Its sound in Paris was noble and persuasive, and it glided over the South like that sacred harmony of the heavenly host, which spoke of 'peace and good' to the watchful shepherds."*

* *Evan. Mag.* vol. xxiv. p. 182. from *Williams on Persecution.*

The cruel persecutions in France, and the generous exertions in England, made a powerful impression on the public mind, in favour and in honour of religious liberty. All unbiassed persons on this occasion saw, that Christian freedom, while it stimulates to acts of charity and benevolence, has for its grand object the secure protection of faith and worship to all the denominations in Christendom. A respectable clergyman of the church of England, at this time, pleading the cause of these distressed protestants, delivered his excellent sentiments as follows :

“ Persecution is contrary to reason and Scripture, and, as may be proved by history, productive of the most baneful effects upon the human mind. It is contrary to *reason* : for, if I claim the privilege of thinking for myself, certainly I ought to concede the same privilege to others. If you would make a convert of me to your opinions, produce your strong reasons, convince my judgment, and I may become a rational convert. But to use fire and sword in order to make me think otherwise than my conscience dictates, is as absurd as it is wicked. Though there are chains to confine the body, yet there are none which can twine around the mind. My thoughts are, and must be, from the very nature of things, free and unfettered by external force.

“ Intolerance is contrary to *Scripture*. I know that the holy Scripture may be perverted to subserve the basest purposes. The best things are most liable to abuse. Medicine is a good thing, and yet, I conceive, that many an unskilful practitioner has killed his patient by improper application. Our Saviour relates a parable of a certain man, who made a great supper, and bade many : and, at the time of supper, sent his servants to invite those that were bidden, but they would not come ; therefore he desired his servants to go out into the highways and hedges, and *compel* them to come in. Hence certain divines have thought themselves justified in using fire and sword to *compel* men to come into the church. Not to mention the absurdity of building an important doctrine on a subordinate circumstance of a parable, it could not be in the power of a few servants to compel, by any other force than that of persuasion, a multitude of people to attend the supper. We see, therefore, how little Christianity is to be blamed for

the absurd abuses which injudicious persons make of its doctrines. By an appeal to history, I might abundantly illustrate the baneful effects of intolerance. There is something in its spirit which seems to poison the very sources of human virtue. It destroys whatever is lovely, whatever is excellent, whatever is amiable in the human character. It converts men into savages;—delighting to glut their eyes with a horrid ferocity on the torments inflicted on their fellow-creatures, and to witness scenes of cruelty which humanity shudders to contemplate.”

These generous and dignified avowals reflect great honour on the head and heart of the man by whom they were delivered; and these were the sentiments and feelings of tens of thousands of British Christians. Those tragic scenes, with the munificent efforts to obtain a suppression of them, gave a fresh impulse to the human mind to assert its native rights, and to claim its liberty—a liberty of conscience and of worship, as one of the greatest blessings of the Creator. Not only was the true character of popery once more strikingly portrayed by the most glaring acts of cruelty, but the shocking absurdity and wickedness of intolerance demonstrated, and presented to the commiseration of all the nations of Europe.

Another great event excited the attention of all ranks in the community; engaged all the learning and abilities in the nation; and tended, perhaps as much as any other, to correct the views, and liberalize the minds, of all classes of society. This was the continued and powerful agitation of catholic emancipation. The Roman catholics had for some years made unexampled efforts, in every part of the united kingdom, to impress the public with the justice and importance of their claims, and had confidently asserted that there was a general willingness to comply with their wishes. Without entering into the merits of this great question, it ought to be observed, that the unrestricted discussion of the catholic claims, by the court ministers, in the two houses of parliament, among all ranks of society, and by the numerous effusions of the press, darkness has been dispersed, knowledge increased, and a more liberal tone of feeling produced and displayed through the nation. Though the most strenuous exertions of the catholics have hitherto proved unsuccessful, and the equity of their

claims have been strongly questioned ; yet the protracted discussion has undoubtedly rectified innumerable errors, softened men's intolerant passions, and induced multitudes to recognise religion as matter of voluntary choice and individual right. The public agitation of this question, and other similar questions, cannot fail to produce effects on all enlightened minds, peculiarly favourable to religious liberty. Whether, therefore, the catholics may, or may not, prove eventually successful in this great struggle, the result of public discussion must necessarily be favourable, by softening inveterate prejudice, diffusing useful knowledge, and promoting social and religious improvement.

A question of great importance arises here : Does not the principle of self-preservation and self-defence necessarily oblige protestants to restrict the *religion* of those, who will not allow toleration to others?—The only case in which religious freedom can be dangerous, is when a religious sect is permitted, which will not tolerate any other, but would re-kindle the fires of persecution, and deluge the country with blood ; and this seems to be the unalterable character of the Roman catholic church. She allows no liberty in religion, but proscribes every other profession as heresy, and that no heresy is to be spared. The instructive documents lately issued from the Vatican, too loudly proclaim to the world, that the infallible head of this church is animated by the same unchangeable hatred to every species of religion out of his own pale, and only waits for a suitable opportunity to root out and destroy every description of protestants in Christendom.

Though this appears to be the unvaried character of the papal power and hierarchy, no man or body of men on earth can interfere by compulsive measures with the *religion* even of Roman catholics, without officiously interposing between the Creator and the creature, and without assuming an authority greater than even that of the Almighty. Here all men are, and ought to be, equally free. Conscience can no more be constrained by penal laws than the wind, or the light of the sun. Every compulsive attempt, therefore, to restrain the faith and worship of catholics, is an attempt to deprive them of their most sacred rights—the rights of their souls derived from God. There is no need of such unnatural restraint ; but

every government ought, in justice and policy, to guarantee them full and perfect liberty of conscience. Let the Roman catholics, then, as well as every other sect, enjoy secure protection from the state, in teaching those religious doctrines which they believe, and in worshipping God agreeably to the dictates of their consciences, without any restraint or license from the civil power; and let them be deprived only of the power of injuring or interrupting others.

Another occurrence, though of inferior moment, it would be improper to overlook. This was the celebration of the third centenary of the Reformation from popery. So important a period could not fail to create great interest in the breasts of all true protestants; and the various protestant princes on the continent, in union with their subjects, solemnly and devoutly commemorated the first open attempt of their forefathers, to obtain their release from popish servitude and cruelty. English protestants could not permit the event to pass unnoticed. Multitudes of sermons, by clergymen and dissenters, were preached on the occasion, many of which were published, creating considerable interest, and giving a suitable impulse to public feeling. This memorable event was very properly commemorated by a public meeting in the metropolis, December 31, 1817; under the superintendence of the duke of Sussex. This numerous and respectable assembly was addressed by persons of the first respectability among the various parties; when the following resolutions were cordially and unanimously adopted, expressing their strong approbation of complete religious emancipation, and unrestricted liberty of conscience.

“ That the right of every man to worship God according to his conscience is a natural, unalienable right, anterior to all civil institutions, which no human authority should ever presume to violate or restrict.

“ That religion is not intended to aggrandize a peculiar class, nor to become an engine of state; but to inform the judgment, to purify the heart, to mitigate by heavenly consolation the calamities of life, and to inspire hopes of immortality, blissful and divine.

“ That such ‘ pure and undefiled’ religion by the Holy Scriptures alone is taught, and that they therefore should be accessible in every language to every individual of every nation

on the globe ; and that all attempts to limit such diffusion, oppose the beneficent purposes of God, and the best and only perfect happiness of man.

“ That, equally intrusive and unworthy are all efforts authoritatively to *impose* any expositions of those Holy Scriptures, which every man for himself is entitled to investigate and to expound ; and which every man should ‘ read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest.’

“ That the experience of Europe, from the *third* to the *sixteenth* century, has demonstrated that these great principles are as important in their practical operation as in theory they are correct ; and that to their violation are mainly attributable those multitudinous ills which for that long period afflicted humanity, deformed the Christian faith, and oppressed the world.

“ That it is the peculiar and important object of this meeting to celebrate, at this tri-centennial period, that glorious Reformation which in 1517 commenced in Saxony :—which substituted knowledge for ignorance, freedom for oppression, and a purer Christianity for corruptions—antichristian and absurd.

“ That the Reformation having promoted the recognition of the great principles which this meeting maintain, has (aided by the art of printing) emancipated many nations from such superstitions and tyranny ; has bestowed on the people constitutional freedom, and restored to magistrates lawful authority ; has burst asunder the fetters which enchained the human mind ; has meliorated the destiny even of those countries which have not yet yielded to its influence ; and has contributed to that improvement in social happiness at which this meeting can rejoice : although society may not yet have attained that state which piety must desire, and philanthropy approve.

“ That whilst this meeting thus celebrate that Reformation, whose influence they desire should be co-extensive with the globe, they seek for that extension only by the energy of argument, and through the force of truth ; and towards Roman catholics, they disclaim all sentiments which Christian charity could censure, or religious freedom would condemn.

“ That this meeting cannot but cordially express pre-eminent delight, that his royal highness the duke of Sussex has condescended to preside upon this great occasion : nor can they but announce their unaffected joy, that he has thus demon-

strated, that his royal house remain firmly attached to the great principles established by the Reformation, and to that protestant faith which their ancestors strenuously maintained, and upon which they were called to the throne of this country."

These propositions contain some of the most important principles ever published to the world, all of which have a direct bearing on the doctrine of unrestricted religious freedom; and when a distinguished member of the royal household took the lead in the open and public avowal of these principles, it must surely gladden the hearts of all British subjects, excepting the patrons of intolerance, the bigots of sectarianism, and the enemies of mankind. Had even the prince regent taken the lead on this occasion, and been firmly supported by all the court ministers, the greatest honour and renown, durable as time, would have been reflected from the imperial crown. This important event afforded one additional proof, that the fundamental doctrines of protestantism were more thoroughly understood and appreciated, than at any other period since the dawn of the reformation.

From the days of Constantine the Great, encroachments upon religious liberty powerfully and progressively multiplied, until even the name of liberty of conscience was exploded, and the doctrine of implicit faith in the decrees of men was universally inculcated. Among the most considerable means of restoring these inestimable blessings to mankind, it would be an inexcusable omission not to mention particularly that freedom of inquiry so prevalent in modern times, accompanied by that degree of liberty which has been allowed in the use of the press. The liberty of the press disseminates knowledge; and, when knowledge is widely diffused, it is equally an act of presumption to attempt to retain men in a state of spiritual vassalage, as it is absurd to require their assent to propositions in religion, which neither their understandings nor consciences approve: but, if articles of faith be of divine origin, they will appear to sufficient advantage, in consequence of the general extension of knowledge, without the officious interference of the coercion of man.

Liberty to make known our theological opinions, naturally promotes free discussion; and free discussion inevitably tends to the developement of truth. By free discussion, the neces-

sary boundaries of liberty have been ascertained, and our obligations to obedience generally understood. These discoveries have not only lead men to advance the claims of conscience, to which they are equally entitled, but have deepened in their minds a conviction of the duty they owe to governors, and stimulated no inconsiderable part of the nation to be obedient from principle. Hence, by the free exercise of the press, the reasoning powers of man have been cultivated and liberalized; the public mind has in a degree been fortified against the insidious attacks of interested politicians. That degree of religious freedom which has been secured to us by legal statute, during this long reign, has engaged our affections on behalf of the government, and insured our steady allegiance to the king, the constitution, and the laws of our country.

During the existence of the star-chamber, all new publications underwent the inspection and revision of persons nominated by that odious court. By its decrees, the number of printers and of presses throughout the kingdom was limited; and the publication of every book, which favoured the cause of Christian freedom, being deemed obnoxious, was suppressed. The long parliament, with equal presumption, usurped this tyrannical authority of licensing all works issued from the press: and it was not till after the accession of William and Mary, that this invaluable branch of English liberty was fully obtained; but, from that period to the death of George the Third, the press has remained generally free.

Controversy naturally excites a spirit of free inquiry; and a spirit of free inquiry in religion, must, ultimately, terminate in the disclosure of truth. By this spirit many absurd opinions are, indeed, obtruded upon the public; but these opinions speedily meet their fate, and sink into oblivion, leaving truth alone to reign triumphant. Free inquiry upon questions in religion unintentionally excited a spirit of implacable malice in the breasts of wicked men, against the advocates of rectitude and piety; but the cause of God and truth, together with that of Christian freedom, eventually prevailed.

The freedom of the press is the grand palladium of religious liberty; and this must be destroyed, before any serious attack can be made upon liberty of conscience. It is a medium through which truth addresses the understandings of the peo-

ple ; and the human mind being assailed by the artillery of truth, will not long continue to be the citadel of error. This has been amply illustrated by the general progress of religion in England, from the period when the liberty of the press was fully obtained, down to the present time. Knowledge has been extensively diffused ; and, as the invariable consequence, the cause of piety has made rapid advances in its approximation to that august period, when the great deceiver of mankind shall be cast out of his kingdom ; be subjugated by the irresistible power of Jehovah ; and be ignominiously confined within the precincts of outer darkness.

By the free exercise of the press, all classes in the community have possessed the means of defending their religious principles, by candid appeals to Scripture, reason, and conscience : and this privilege being enjoyed, truth and equity has gradually triumphed over superstition and intolerance. The public mind has been excited to a strict examination of the principles of all parties, and has discovered them to be not only harmless, but friendly to the sound principles of our happy constitution : we are warranted, therefore, to conclude, that the tone of public feeling is become increasingly liberal and beneficial to mankind.

To the spirit and principle of free inquiry, however, some opponents remain. It is still a favourite object with some persons, calling themselves protestants ! to use their utmost endeavours to hinder the progress of free inquiry, and to promote, as far as possible, the darkness of the middle ages ; from a persuasion, that the ignorance or limited knowledge of the common people will augment their power, wealth, and influence. With these favourite objects in view, they have divided mankind, perhaps unintentionally, into two classes—slaves and oppressors. But when any part of a religious system shrinks from free inquiry, or is at all afraid of full investigation, every discerning person will conclude that there is something in it extremely suspicious : there is some theological secret, some ecclesiastical mystery, some point in the science of priestly magic, which dares not appear in the light of day. The prevalence of such priestcraft, damping the energies of the human intellect, discouraging mental improvement, and suppressing the right of private judgment, is no doubt one

principal reason why so many persons have of late years renounced their pretended protestantism, and gone over to the Roman catholics. What consequence could be more natural and easy? When men's intellectual energies are once allayed, they naturally seek admission into a religious communion founded upon the basis of infallibility; when, without the toil of personal investigation, they have only to believe as the church believes, and practise what the church commands, then they conclude all will be well. Free inquiry, personal claims, and individual choice, are all exploded: the church performs these friendly offices for them, and they have only to accept what she offers, and obey what she enjoins.

The nation, having tasted the melioration of literature and religion, could not help feeling exceedingly jealous of every claim of spiritual power, and carefully watchful against extending the authority of spiritual men, beyond the bounds of reason and revelation. Our country rejoiced to allow them unmolested freedom to do good, to spread the knowledge and practice of religion, and to promote peace and good-will amongst mankind; and has never failed to applaud and reward them, when they have been patterns of virtue, and examples of piety. Such powers and prerogatives as these, God and man will readily allow them; but as to any others, they certainly have little right to them, and have seldom made a wise or rational use of them. On the contrary, innumerable have been the confusions and mischiefs occasioned by the usurpers of spiritual authority. They have ever used it with insolence, and generally abused it to oppression and the worst of cruelties. The history of such transactions cannot be a pleasing and grateful task; yet, on many accounts, it may be instructive and useful: especially as it tends to awaken men to an abhorrence of all the methods of persecution, and directs them to guard against those antichristian pretensions, by which persecution has always been supported.

If a person were to judge of the nature and spirit of the Christian religion, by the spirit and conduct of too many who have made a profession of it, he could scarcely fail to censure it as an institution unworthy of God, subversive of the interest and happiness of society, and designed to enrich and aggrandize a few, at the expense of the liberty, reason, consciences,

estates, and lives of many. For, what confusions and calamities, what ruin and desolation, what rapine and murders, have been introduced into the world, under the pretended authority of Jesus Christ, and with the view of promoting Christianity ! What is the greatest part of our ecclesiastical history but a history of the pride and ambition, avarice and tyranny, treachery and cruelty of some, and of the persecutions and miseries of others ? Upon a view of these calamities, what could an unprejudiced person, unacquainted with the genuine nature of Christianity, think, but that it was the worst religion in the world ; tending to destroy all the sentiments of compassion and humanity, and inspiring its votaries with that wisdom which is from beneath, which is “ earthly, sensual and devilish ?”

The greatest advantage an enlightened people can enjoy is the liberty of discussing, without control, all subjects that come within the range of human investigation. This liberty, has, during the late reign, been claimed and exercised by all ranks in society, by means of which undefiled religion has triumphed over error and delusion. So long as Britons shall maintain an erect posture, and claim with a steady hand the liberty of discussion, religious freedom will flourish ; but should this be lost or impaired, the principles of religious liberty will neither be well understood, nor long retained. As a nation we have been learning for many generations, and have at length discovered, that the magistrate is not the judge of truth : we now refuse to engage his authority either in the defence, or in the suppression, of religious opinions. This, it is known, would betray the greatest inattention to the nature and design of political society, as well as to the spirit, the doctrine, and the interests of Christianity. When a national government is formed, it is *power*, not *wisdom* and *grace*, that is placed in the hands of the magistrate ; whence it is clearly understood, that his concern as magistrate is only with those objects upon which *power* can operate. On this account, the administration of justice, the protection of property, the defence of every peaceable member of the community from violence and outrage, are found naturally to fall within the province of the civil ruler, since all these may be accomplished by *power* : but to affirm that the civil ruler has power to distinguish between truth and error, and is invested with either ability or authority

to support by force one set of religious opinions, and to suppress others, is found to be one of the most blind and dangerous delusions ever obtruded upon an ignorant world.

The religion of Jesus Christ can be supported only by *evidence*: when this is presented and recognised, we cannot withhold our assent, but when it is wanting, no power or authority on earth can enforce it. All persons who have justly claimed the honour of Christians and of Britons, have made two important discoveries: they have ascertained from the most satisfactory proof, on the one hand, that every attempt to enforce religion without evidence is an encroachment on man's rational nature; and, on the other, that in every age in proportion as the people have cherished free inquiry and exercised unrestricted religious liberty, their intellectual faculties have improved, the happiness of society has been increased, and the prosperity of undefiled religion promoted.

By a due attention to the experience and history of our country, we find, that to the spirit and principles of freedom we are indebted for those improvements in arts and sciences, which have meliorated in so great a degree the condition of society. The middle ages, being the darkest period of which we have any particular account, were remarkable for two things: extreme ignorance, and an excessive veneration for received opinions; circumstances which are always united, and which operate on each other as cause and effect. The whole compass of science was in those times subject to restraint; every new opinion was looked upon as dangerous. To affirm the globe we inhabit to be round, was deemed heresy, and for asserting its motion, the immortal Galileo was confined in the prisons of the Inquisition.* The shape of the tonsure, or the manner in which a monk should shave his beard, would then throw the nation into convulsions. In proportion as the world became more enlightened, this unnatural policy of restraint retired from society; and having entirely abandoned the sciences, it has taken its last stand on religion. This was long considered of a nature so peculiarly sacred, that every attempt to alter it, or to impair the reverence for its received institutions, was denominated heresy—a crime of the first magnitude. Although

* Milton's Prose Works, vol. i. p. 310.

the greatest danger has been attributed to free inquiry, when extended to the principles of religion, it has been ascertained, that there is no department where it has been more necessary, or its interference more decidedly beneficial. Whatever alarm may be taken at the claim of unrestricted liberty of discussion, religion has been an unspeakable gainer by it: its abuses have been corrected, and its purity and excellency presented to the approbation of mankind.

Influenced by these important considerations, men have at length ventured to claim the right of thinking for themselves, and of following the convictions of their own minds, on all subjects relating to the worship of God and the salvation of souls. It is found that every man who refuses to make this righteous—this rational claim, not only violates his responsibility and allegiance to Jesus Christ, but acts in hostility to his own immortal interests. So far as he refuses to make this noblest claim of man, he renounces his obligation to God, and tamely yields himself the slave of mortals. Those, however, who claim this unmolested independency and improvement of their minds, cheerfully allow the same to all mankind, as a benefit bestowed upon them by their Creator, as belonging to their rational constitution, as existing wherever man exists, as a blessing which no man can be deprived of without the worst kind of usurpation and violence. On these substantial grounds, they renounce the imperious dictates of men in every thing religious; they claim the rights of conscience as sacred in the sight of God; they choose their religion for themselves; they worship God according to the dictates of Scripture and of conscience. This liberty they claim and exercise as their *natural right*, independent of permission from others. As all men have a natural right to their senses and limbs, and may use them in what manner soever they please, that is not injurious to other members of society; so they have an equal right to believe the Gospel, to worship God according to their own views of his holy word, to practise all the amiable duties of Christian piety, and no man on earth can interrupt them, without involving himself in the guilt of encroachment and persecution.

Our ancestors had very little knowledge of this liberty. They were in the most deplorable condition; when no doctrines were allowed to be preached or published but what sup-

ported superstition and intolerance ; when priests had the direction of the pulpit and the press, restraining both to keep the people in ignorance and slavery. This has been the common fault of catholics and protestants ; but, thanks be to God ! we live in better times ; when both the pulpit and the press are, in general, emancipated from the oppressions of men. The value of religious freedom begins to be appreciated, as standing closely connected with the prosperity of religion, and the happiness of society ; and it is found to be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for any man to love God or his country, whatever may be his pretensions, who is the patron of ignorance and intolerance. It has been ascertained from indubitable fact, on the one hand, that all who are the friends of man are opposed to priestcraft and spiritual oppression, the two great enemies to God and human happiness ; and, on the other, that all who are enemies to unfettered religious freedom, are, in the same proportion, enemies to mankind, hostile to the welfare of society, and opposed to the salvation of souls.

Having made frequent mention of the three denominations of dissenters, and their united exertions in the cause of religious freedom, it will be proper here to give some account of their association. Early in the reign of George the Second, the presbyterians, independents, and baptists in London, unitedly associated together, in the first instance, to consult upon the most proper measures to obtain a repeal of the corporation and test acts. After having assembled several times, it was resolved that every congregation of the three denominations, within ten miles of London, should be recommended to appoint two deputies ; and a committee was chosen by the body for the management of their affairs, and to report their proceedings to the general assembly of the deputies. It was soon found that whatever might be the result of their attempts to procure the repeal of the obnoxious statutes, the dissenters would derive considerable advantage, in other respects, from the establishment of a permanent society to superintend their public concerns. It was therefore resolved, at a general meeting on the 14th of January, 1736, " That there should be an annual choice of Deputies to take care of the civil affairs of the Dissenters."

This society had not been long formed, before it was called

upon, in various instances, to protect the rights of the subject. Certain dissenters of the parish of St. Olave, Southwark, applied to the committee respecting certain clauses in a bill, then depending in parliament, for rebuilding the parish church, which tended to subject the dissenters of the parish to new and unreasonable rates on burials. Similar cases also occurred at St. Leonard's, Shoreditch, and St. Mary's, Rotherhithe, when this society determined to give the complainants all the assistance in their power. Petitions were accordingly drawn up and presented to the house of commons; and, in all the three cases, redress was obtained. In the case of St. Leonard's, the bill had actually passed into law, without the knowledge of those who considered themselves aggrieved by its provisions; but the parish being obliged to make a second application for an extension of their powers, their proceedings were firmly opposed, and all the clauses which particularly affected the dissenters were repealed.

From these interesting occurrences, the committee began to feel the importance of the office to which they had been appointed; and in a letter which they addressed to their friends, in the various congregations of England, they said—"You well know that the corporation and test acts were the important business that gave rise to our meeting. But though this be the chief, it is not the only thing we have in view. We would willingly attend to every thing that may remedy or prevent any inconveniency to the cause of civil and religious liberty; and we have the satisfaction to inform you, that we have already seen some desirable fruits of our watchfulness and care."

The principal object of this letter, however, was to communicate the information, that they had unanimously resolved upon applying to parliament, the ensuing session, for the repeal or explanation of the corporation and test acts; and to entreat the zealous co-operation of their friends in the country. To forward this attempt, application was made to the leading members of both houses; and a treasurer was appointed to receive the voluntary contributions of congregations and individuals, towards defraying the expenses of the society, in attending to these and similar important affairs.

The committee having made application to the parliament

circulated another letter among their friends, giving an account of their exertions and the unsuccessful issue. "We had the satisfaction," say they, "in our application to gentlemen, before the affair was brought into the house, to find the greatest part of them own, that what we asked was a reasonable thing. The motion was made and seconded, and the debate entirely supported, by known and approved whigs, and most of such as are also upon good terms with the administration." The attempt, however worthy and excellent, completely failed. The committee took a distinguished part in the other applications that were afterwards made to obtain a repeal of the two obnoxious statutes; and, though their endeavours were founded on reason and justice, humanity and religion, they proved absolutely unsuccessful, as already detailed in this volume.

This society was now regarded as well qualified, by its wisdom and experience, to afford assistance in every weighty affair among the dissenters, in all countries subject to British power. In the year 1743, a letter was transmitted from the governor of Connecticut, relating to certain disorders and confusions, in the religious services of a particular class of persons. To suppress these religious singularities, the colonial government had enacted certain penal statutes, which were strongly reprobated in the mother country. The governor's letter was a long and laboured attempt to justify the measures adopted by the government of Connecticut. To this letter the committee of the three denominations, replied in a style so consonant to the doctrine and spirit of Christian melioration, that it will be proper to furnish the reader with an extract from it as follows:

"We all have a great dislike to those principles which we hear, from other hands, as well as from your honour's, have with too great eagerness and success been propagated in those parts. We see the tendency of these principles, and of the way that is taken to spread them; they plainly tend to create feuds and animosities, and to destroy that peace, unity and mutual good-will, which is so amiable among neighbours, so essential among Christians. We fear that such opinions and practices, as you justly complain of, will not only lead many weak persons into enthusiastic delusions, but will likewise much abate the spirit of industry and application to business, which is well

known to be absolutely necessary to the prosperity of the colony. We are sensible that by the propagation of such sentiments as have lately crept in among you, the minds of many must be unhinged, endless doubts and perplexities will arise, and scepticism or infidelity seem likely to be the unhappy issue. But great and manifest as these mischiefs are, we cannot be of opinion that the magistrate has any thing to do in this matter, only to see that the public peace is preserved; that there be no riots or tumults; and that his subjects be not allowed to assault, hurt, maim, wound, plunder, or kill one another in these religious contests."

The letter from which this extract is made was the means of restoring harmony among the contending parties; the wisdom and good counsel contained in it, occasioned various applications; in all of which, by the munificent exertions of the society, the desired relief was obtained.

Another and a stronger proof of the reputation which this society had acquired among the American colonists, and of their beneficial influence at home, was strikingly manifest in the affair, so long in agitation, relative to the introduction of bishops to America. In the year 1749, it was generally believed that a scheme was in contemplation to make two new bishops, one for Barbadoes, and the other for Virginia, for the alleged purpose of conferring orders on candidates for the Christian ministry, who had been educated in America, without giving them the trouble of coming to England. The leading peculiarities of this intended ecclesiastical establishment, as communicated from archbishop Secker to Sir Robert Walpole, were, that these new bishops to be sent over by the English government, should exercise similar jurisdiction, temporal as well as spiritual, over the clergy of their communion in America, as had been conferred on the late bishop of London's commissioners, or *should be conferred on any future commissioners.*

This report having created much alarm, and the measure appearing particularly obnoxious, and likely to be exceedingly prejudicial if carried into effect, the society appointed a deputation to communicate their sentiments to his majesty's ministers. The deputation obtained an interview with the dukes of Bedford and Newcastle, the lord chancellor, and Mr. Pelham,

all of whom declared, "that the affair was far from being concluded; that nothing would be done in it without the maturest deliberation; and that they should be very willing to hear objections thereto from persons of any consequence." For this seasonable interposition, which produced the desired effect, the committee of the society received a letter of thanks, from the house of representatives of the province of Massachusetts, signed by the speaker, requesting them to continue their friendly assistance.

This scheme having lain dormant for nearly twenty years, intelligence was received from Massachusetts, stating, that circumstances had occurred which had again excited painful apprehensions, that the attempt was about to be revived with additional vigour. Upon the reception of these communications, giving an affecting picture of the evils that would arise from such a measure, the committee obtained another friendly interview with several members of the administration; and having received the most positive assurances that no such intention existed, they had the satisfaction of removing all the fears which had possessed the minds of their trans-atlantic brethren. The liberal and amicable reception which the bishops met with in America, after the separation of the two countries, may be considered as a proof that the resistance made in England did not originate in principles of intolerance against episcopacy, but in a just fear of its improper influence when allied with temporal power.

To furnish the reader with more enlarged views of the influence and advantages of this society, it will be proper to give an account of the proceedings in what was called the Sheriff's case. Mr. Robert Grosvenor, a protestant dissenter, who had never taken the sacrament according to the usage of the church of England, and who scrupled it as a qualification for an office, was chosen sheriff of London and Middlesex. The committee encouraged Mr. Grosvenor to refuse the office, under a conviction that the corporation act, which required that qualification, was an effectual bar to his election, and that the toleration act would protect him in refusing to qualify. Judging this to be a point of great importance, not only to the citizens of London, but to every corporation in the kingdom, the committee determined to support him against any measures

which the city might pursue, to force his compliance, or punish his refusal.

In the first instance, the city moved the court of king's bench for an information against Mr. Grosvenor. The committee engaged several eminent counsel on his behalf, and the court unanimously refused the information. The city being foiled in this attempt, brought an action of debt against him, which was shortly after abandoned. Here the unpleasant affair ended for a time; and when they renewed their attempts, they were resisted and rendered unavailing by the vigilance of the committee.

By these repeated failures, the city was at length convinced that the existing by-laws could not reach the dissenters; but, to remedy this supposed evil, they made a *new* law, with a view, as they alleged, of procuring fit and able persons to serve the office of sheriff. By this politic measure, they imposed a fine of more than four hundred pounds upon every person, who, being nominated by the lord mayor, should decline standing the election at the common-hall; and six hundred pounds upon every one who, being elected by the common-hall, should refuse to serve the office. It was notorious that this by-law was contrived for the double purpose of oppressing the dissenters, and raising money. The fines were expressly appropriated towards defraying the expense of building the mansion-house. Many dissenters were nominated and elected to the office, not because their services were wanted—for some through age or infirmity were wholly incompetent:—but because it was known they would submit to the fine, rather than serve an office, for which, they conceived, they were disqualified by law, except upon a condition with which they could not conscientiously comply. Great numbers of them, therefore, paid their fines; and, by these proceedings, upwards of *fifteen thousand* pounds were obtained by the corporation of London.

The oppression growing so enormous, the legality of this by-law, and the proceedings founded upon it, became the subject of anxious consideration. Since the corporation act had enacted, that no person should be capable of serving an office in a corporation, who had not received the sacrament according to the forms of the church of England, within a year previous to his election; and since the toleration act appeared to

have removed all the penal consequences of nonconformity, it was thought that this system of exaction might be legally and effectually resisted.

To bring this important cause to a decision, three dissenters, Messrs. Sheafe, Streatfield and Evans, were elected to this office; and, applying to the committee, they were encouraged to refuse serving. The city, upon their refusal, brought separate actions of debt against each, in the Sheriff's court, the judges of which were persons appointed by the common council. That against Mr. Streatfield could not be maintained, since he was found to be out of their jurisdiction, and the city refused to accept his offer of trying the merits of his cause. The actions, however, against the two others, were carried on; and, after much delay and expense, both causes were determined in favour of the city. The defendants then brought writs of error, returnable in the court of Hustings, of which the recorder of London was sole judge, when the former judgments were affirmed. The defendants then sued out a special commission to examine and correct errors, directed to lord chief justice Willes, lord chief baron Parker and three others, when the judgments of the above courts were unanimously reversed.

The corporation not being satisfied with this solemn decision, brought both the causes, by writ of error, before the house of lords; but Mr. Sheafe dying, only the case of Mr. Evans came to a hearing; and on the 4th of February, 1767, the lords spiritual and temporal gave judgment unanimously in favour of Mr. Evans. By this decision, the important question, in which both the civil and religious liberties of protestant dissenters were so much involved, was finally set at rest.

Many affecting cases of persons riotously disturbing the public worship of dissenters, were submitted to the attention of the committee of this society, when, by prompt and peaceable measures, they obtained satisfactory redress; but, in some instances, they were constrained to institute legal proceedings against notorious offenders. In the year 1797, a person of this class was indicted for disturbing a congregation at Ryegate. He was tried, and found guilty, at the Surry assizes, before Mr. Justice Buller, a part of whose sensible and luminous address to the jury upon summing up the evidence, deserves a place in the memorials of religious liberty.

“ This is an indictment,” said the judge, “ founded on a statute which passed in the reign of king William and queen Mary, and known by the name of the toleration act. The object of that statute was, what every man in his heart must commend, to leave every man to worship God in his way, to follow the dictates of his own conscience, and to observe them in such a manner as he thinks right, he not doing mischief to any other member of the community. It is undoubtedly to be wished that this indulgence should be granted to all ranks of men.

“ The ground of this prosecution is, that when this dissenting congregation were met for the purpose of worship, the defendant Yeoman thought fit to go into this congregation, disturb them in that worship, and, according to the evidence, to insult and abuse the minister to a great degree. It is said by his counsel, that he did not mean to disturb the congregation. Disturbing the minister, who was then performing his duty as minister of that congregation, was the greatest insult that could be offered to the congregation.

“ It should be remembered, that where people are assembled together in a place of worship, for the purpose of paying their duty to the Divine Being, a man, who does not agree in opinion with them, is not at liberty to go into that assembly and quarrel with the minister, because he does not happen to utter the doctrine which is agreeable to his mind. The object and purpose of their being allowed to have such a meeting-house, is because they do not agree with the established church. They have ideas peculiar to themselves, and they have as much a right to be pleased with their mode of worship, as we have with ours; and they are protected by the law in worshipping God in their own way, if they comply with the requisites of the law, as much as we are.

“ These people were doing no more than by law they had a right to do, when this man chose to go into this chapel, insult the minister, and disturb the congregation in the manner you have heard. I am bound to tell you the evidence brings this man's offence clearly within the act of parliament: and if you believe the evidence, it is your duty to find the defendant guilty.”

A proper apology being made by the defendant, though so

notoriously guilty, the greatest lenity was exercised, and he was not called up for judgment. The committee contributed upwards of forty pounds towards the costs.

Numerous instances were laid before the committee, of magistrates refusing to register places designed for public worship under the toleration act. A case of this description occurred in Montgomeryshire, when the committee, desirous at all times of procuring the redress of grievances in the most pacific and least expensive way, laid the case before the attorney-general, and transmitted his opinion into the country; which being perfectly satisfactory, as to the duty of magistrates to register places for dissenting worship, produced the desired effect. In many other cases of the same kind, the committee were under the painful necessity of applying to the court of king's bench for a *mandamus*, to compel the magistrates to do their duty. At Tregoy, a magistrate had ordered a distress on the goods of a dissenter under the conventicle act, and refusing to make satisfaction to the party, the committee, on the opinion of counsel, recommended an action to be brought against him. At the trial, judgment was given in favour of the dissenter; and it was ordered, that the magistrate should pay costs, together with the amount of the goods which had been sold, and that what remained unsold should be returned to the plaintiff.

This society received multiplied applications for redress against the unjust demands of clergymen, and for refusing to do their duty. In one instance their advice was solicited respecting a clergyman claiming fees, for churching the wives of dissenters in his parish, though they had not been at church; for marriages, though solemnized in another parish; and for burials in the burying-ground belonging to the dissenters. The parties were recommended to refuse payment, and the clergyman abandoned his groundless claim. The committee were frequently applied to in cases relating to marriage. A clergyman in the county of Durham refused to marry a couple, because they were born of baptist parents, and had not been baptized. The young people supposing they had no other resource, retired to the north, and were married in Scotland; but on their return, the clergyman demanded his fees, for a duty which he had refused to perform. The fees being denied him, he actually instituted proceedings in the spiritual court;

but on the interference of the committee of this society, he changed his purpose, and dropped the prosecution.

At Margate, the vicar refused burial to a parishioner who had been baptized by a dissenting minister, and bade the friends of the deceased to bury the corpse in the fields. It was, however, buried in the church-yard, but the vicar would neither read the burial service, nor suffer his curate to read it. The case was then laid before the archbishop of Canterbury, who not only expressed his strong disapprobation of the vicar's conduct, but promised he should be reprimanded, and be left to the course of the law for any similar misbehaviour in future.

At Staines, the *churchwarden* refused to permit the bell to be tolled at the death or burial of the children of dissenters, or even the corpses to be carried into the church prior to interment. The committee having apprized him that his refusal was illegal, and that, if he continued to refuse, proceedings would be instituted against him in the ecclesiastical court, no further complaint was made.

After a lapse of years, the instances of clergymen refusing to read the burial service at the interment of those who had been baptized by dissenting ministers, were so numerous, that it became absolutely necessary to obtain a judicial recognition of a right so frequently disputed. The only competent mode of redress, was that of proceeding in the ecclesiastical court against some clergyman, whose persevering refusal would diminish the reluctance which the committee naturally felt to the adoption of hostile measures.

An instance of this kind occurred in the Rev. John Wight Wickes, rector of Wardly cum Belton, Rutlandshire, who, in the year 1808, refused to bury the infant child of two of his parishioners, John and Hannah Swingler. The committee wrote a friendly letter to him on the subject, to which he paid no attention. Application was then made to the bishop of Peterborough, in whose diocese his benefice was situated. His lordship admitting the right of dissenters to burial according to the forms of the established church, informed the committee, that he had sent Sir William Scott's opinion to Mr. Wickes, with which he did not seem satisfied; that he should not interfere any further in the business; and, therefore, that the committee might proceed against Mr. Wickes as they should think proper.

The committee having adopted these prudential measures without success, immediately caused proceedings to be instituted in the arches court of Canterbury ; and, the admission of the articles having been opposed by Mr. Wickes, on the ground that the facts stated did not constitute any offence, the question of law was, the year following, brought to a decision in doctors' commons. Dr. Arnold and Dr. Swabey having been heard for the prosecutor, and Dr. Adams and Dr. Edwards for the defendant, judgment was given in favour of the dissenters, in the most ample and liberal decision, by the official principal, Sir John Nicholl, which was afterwards published to the world.

It will not be improper briefly to mention two other cases, in which the assistance of the committee was solicited and employed with success. The churchwardens of a parish in Essex not permitting a poor man in the workhouse to attend divine worship among the dissenters, and imperiously demanding his attendance at the parish church, a counsel's opinion was taken, by which it appeared that they had no authority for making such demand. A copy of this opinion being sent to the offending churchwardens, no further complaint was made. The other was the case of a clergyman at Falmouth, who had obtained possession of the trust deeds belonging to a dissenting place of worship, and refusing to deliver them up, a bill in chancery was filed against him, on which he submitted, and paid the costs.

The laudable and beneficent exertions of this society were signally displayed in opposing and overthrowing lord Sidmouth's bill, in promoting the new act of toleration, and by munificently aiding the cause of the persecuted French protestants. The knowledge of the existence of this society, defending the rights and liberties of the people against encroachment and persecution, served, in a great degree, to restrain the violence of those who could only breathe intolerance. It will be proper to add, that the account here furnished of this excellent institution, is wholly derived from its own approved and authentic documents.*

When the rights and liberties of Britons were endangered

* History and Proceedings of the Deputies.

in the year 1811, another important institution, already mentioned, was founded in the metropolis, called, "The Protestant Society for the Protection of Religious Liberty." This society, according to its title, is founded on the broad basis of religious liberty, and is composed of members of the established church, in union with dissenters, who act in concert, and, with a noble spirit, defend the religious rights and liberties of every class of Christians. Its comprehensive system embraces all who suffer in the cause of Christ and for the sake of conscience, how widely soever they may differ in their views of doctrine or forms of worship, and extends its melioration to protect the freedom of the press on these subjects, as well as the liberty of public worship. This institution, though in a state of comparative infancy, has been of most essential service, not only by making unparalleled exertions for the rejection of lord Sidmouth's bill, and the establishment of the new toleration act, but also by defending the legal claims of Britons, in numerous important instances, against riot and intolerance. This society, as well as the former, made prompt application to his majesty's government in behalf of the persecuted in France, but made no attempts to afford them pecuniary relief. The reader will best discover its excellent spirit and principles by advert-
ing to the first two resolutions adopted at the general meeting of the committee, convened for the purpose of taking into consideration this alarming persecution, being expressed as follows :

"That this committee have been taught by their forefathers, and ever will continue to regard the right of every man, in every age, and in every country, to worship God according to his conscience, as an invaluable, sacred, and unalienable right, which no individuals, or governments, or legislatures can, without injustice and oppression, directly or indirectly infringe.— That although this committee be principally appointed to protect the religious freedom of their fellow-countrymen, in their native land, yet they should be undeserving the name of Britons, of protestants, of Christians, and even of men, if their philanthropy was not extensive as the world, if they did not sympathize with all who suffer for conscience' sake, if they did not regard religious persecution, by any sect, with alarm and abhorrence; and if they did not endeavour to effect its

extinction by the exertion of every energy which they possess."

On these dignified principles, this society employed its munificent exertions to obtain liberty for the unlimited propagation of Christianity in India, as particularly noticed in the foregoing section. Nor ought its more recent operations to be forgotten. Among those instances which engaged its attention was a bill privately introduced into parliament, entitled, "The Parish Clerks' Bill;" which, being masked by so specious a title, was actually read a first and second time, and referred to a committee, before its contents were known. This bill would have laid a tax of *ten thousand* pounds annually on the inhabitants of the metropolis alone, and have imposed upon dissenting ministers duties as unprecedented and intolerable, as they were novel and absurd. By the vigorous efforts of this society, in conjunction with those of the society belonging to the three denominations, the evil was discovered, the design exposed, and the rejection of the bill obtained.

Another bill was last year brought into parliament, entitled, "A Bill to prevent the Misapplication of Poors' Rates." What title could be more specious or captivating? By this bill parochial officers would have been enabled to separate all the children in the kingdom, whose parents were unable wholly to support them, from the parental care, to seclude them in workhouses, or to remove them to distant places, where their religious instruction would have been either wholly neglected, or their religious freedom openly violated by forcibly educating the children of all classes of dissenters according to the tenets of the established church. Thus those parents would have been punished by a legislative enactment, whose affection for their children would have prompted them to endure any privations, rather than part with their offspring, to be "*instructed* and employed" by the heads of parishes—instructed in religious principles which the parents did not believe, and which the children could not repeat without uttering falsehoods. Was not this measure similar in effect to the execrated Schism bill, which, in the reign of queen Anne, was intended to deprive protestant dissenters of their parental and dearest rights, in the education of their own children? On the principles of political economy the measure was indefensible. It would

have encouraged, not repressed, the miseries of a redundant population. The parents who loved their children could not have been forcibly separated from their offspring, without a violation of the most sacred bonds of union ; while those who loved them not, by indulging the most brutal feelings, would have hailed the measure as a bounty and reward. Though this bill could not be arrested in its progress through the house of commons ; yet by the prompt applications of the protestant society, and the intelligence of lord Liverpool, lord Holland, and the marquis of Lansdowne, its obnoxious visage was unmasked, its deformity exposed, its baneful effects developed, and the measure finally rejected in the house of lords. By the rejection of this bill, the poor laws were prevented from becoming an additional source of civil and religious oppression to those whom they were intended to relieve.

During the short session of parliament at the commencement of the present year, this society performed a similar friendly office, in which the welfare of the community, and that of public institutions, were particularly interested. Its prompt attention was directed to the five important acts which so deeply affected the general state of the country, especially to the bill for preventing "Seditious Meetings." By this bill, any meeting of more than fifty persons, for the purpose, or on pretext, of deliberating upon any public grievance, or any matter in church or state, except parish meetings, were deemed illegal, and the promoters of them exposed to punishment. But by a direct application to the government, and a friendly correspondence with lord Liverpool, from whom the most prompt and polite attention was received, a provision was inserted exempting all meetings held in rooms and buildings from the operation of the bill. The insertion of this clause was a measure of very great moment to all ranks and denominations of the community ; and when it is recollected that the act had been twice committed in the house of commons, and sanctioned by powerful majorities before the insertion of the clause, may it not be affirmed that the patrons of religious freedom are the best supporters of civil liberty, and the greatest friends of their country ?

In the month of May, this excellent institution holds its annual meeting in the metropolis, for the purpose of receiving the report of the committee, and of witnessing all its important

operations during the year. In the year 1817, the lord mayor was called to preside ; when his lordship opened the business of the day, by expressing the high degree of pleasure which he felt in meeting this society, not mixed up with any political object, but founded on the broad principles of civil and religious liberty ; in supporting which he conceived he maintained the authority of government, while he protected the privileges of the people : adding, “ that no government certainly has any right to interfere with our religious principles or forms of worship.” The report being read, his lordship expressed his confidence that the society must be fully satisfied with the laudable exertions of the committee, not only on account of the good they had done, but the evil they had prevented ; concluding, “ that the very existence of such a society must be a great check on the prevailing disposition to encroach upon the rights and liberties of the people.”

At the public anniversary in 1818, the duke of Sussex presided ; and having expressed the high degree of interest and gratification which he felt on the occasion, the royal chairman said—His opinions on religious subjects were well known. This society accorded with those opinions. Liberty of conscience was the birthright of man. It originated before society was organized. Human laws are not of divine inspiration, but partake of the infirmities of man. Religious liberty ought not, therefore, to fluctuate with the laws ; and, indeed, the best laws should change with circumstances ; and institutions, beneficent in their commencement, often become injurious, and require to be abrogated or improved. By his birth, he was a member of the established church ; but he never forgot that it was not a church established by divine right, but a church established *by law* ; and that the three branches of the legislature could regulate and reform that church. He not only belonged to the church, but respected the church : but if the church deviated from right conduct, he would not defend it. His struggles in the great cause of liberty, he was ever ready to renew ; and any calumnies which might be uttered against him he knew how to despise.

In the year 1819, Sir James Mackintosh was called to preside, whose splendid talents and liberal feelings were displayed in a speech at considerable length. Alluding to the eloquent

and interesting address of the secretary, he said—"I declare, that I never, in the whole course of my life, heard, in any assembly, a speech more conclusive, more enlightened, or more eloquent, than that which I have this day heard from your excellent secretary. It affords me pleasure to succeed a royal duke in this situation, as it reflects additional honour on the house of Brunswick, when its princes act on those principles which placed their family on the throne; and they could not act more consonantly with those principles, than by placing the great body of protestant dissenters, who are the friends of their royal house, who assisted in placing the crown of England firmly on their heads, in the enjoyment of those privileges to which by reason, as well as by right, they are unquestionably entitled. For my own part, from my youth, I have been devoted to the sacred cause of civil and religious liberty; and I cannot but feel high honour, in the singular gratification of presiding at a meeting of a great body of dissenters, the most protestant of a protestant world, the authors of the principles of religious liberty among mankind, the fosterers and preservers of the English constitution, I was ignorant, till this day, that scenes of vexation, such as have been described, could have occurred in this civilized country; and the knowledge of their existence will certainly induce me to watch with more vigilance every measure connected with this subject, that may be brought before the legislature. I shall be most happy to state every grievance that may be presented to my notice, and to assist in obtaining for the dissenters all those rights to which they are entitled. I consider that I should be disgraced in the eyes of this respectable assembly if I did not act publicly upon the principles which I now publicly profess. I therefore solemnly pledge myself, on every occasion, to endeavour to carry into effect the instructions which I have received, and to promote your honourable and enlightened views."

At the anniversary of this society for the present year, lord Holland presided; and, after an address from the secretary, which captivated and astonished the numerous assemble for upwards of three hours, his lordship arose and addressed the audience as follows:

"When I recollect that the chair was filled by the first magistrate of the city of London, by an illustrious and royal duke,

and by my eloquent friend, Sir James Mackintosh, who presided on the last occasion, I cannot but consider it a great honour to be placed here by the call of my enlightened fellow-countrymen among protestant dissenters. I recollect, gentlemen, that this society, at least the meeting on this day, is composed chiefly, although not entirely, of protestant dissenters, the object of the institution not being exclusively confined to protestant dissenters, but the promotion of religious freedom all over the world ; and when I consider that the great number of the audience I am now addressing belong to the various bodies of dissenters, that enhances to me, though a member of the church of England, the value of the honour I have this day received. I adopt the sentiment, if not the words of Neal, in his excellent History of the Puritans—As long as there is a protestant dissenter in England, there will be a friend of liberty, of the constitution, and of man.

“ Attached as protestant dissenters have ever been to the best principles, the protestant dissenters of this day appear yet wiser and more liberal. Their notions are not exclusive. They know that in the church of England, and, from the improvement of the times, even in the church of Rome, many great, ardent and fervent friends of religious liberty are to be found ; and it was justly and properly observed by the reverend gentleman who spoke second on this occasion, that the members of the church of England, if they well understood their interest, are not less interested in the principles of religious liberty than those who dissent from them.

“ The very title by which this society is designated contains the principles on which it is founded, ‘ The Protestant Society for the Protection of Religious Liberty.’ It is upon the principles of religious liberty that we are to act, not upon principles of toleration. Those who enjoy their liberty by tolerance are not free. I repeat, that those who enjoy their liberty by tolerance are not free. The genuine principle of religious liberty is the right of conscience, a right of worshipping God according to the dictates of one’s own conscience ; and not merely that right, but the right of inculcating those principles which we believe to be calculated to promote the present and eternal happiness of mankind.

“ With respect to the proceedings that have passed, I can-

not help expressing my full and hearty concurrence. In the first resolution, you have expressed that loyalty which has always distinguished the protestant dissenters towards the house of Brunswick ; and I am sure it is a heartfelt gratification to me to learn, though the rumour had reached me before, that his majesty, with that urbanity which adorns him, and which accompanies him on all occasions, expressed himself in the liberal and conciliating manner which he did, and that he displayed the feelings which he undoubtedly cherishes, as to the obligations which his family owes to the protestant dissenters of this country. The next resolution you have passed states more fully, correctly, and, in my opinion, not in the least degree too broadly, the principles upon which we act. The third demonstrates, that you are not bound by any narrow prejudices to our own soil, but feel for the cause of religious liberty all over the world. I am, though a churchman, contending for that liberty which Locke, also a churchman, contended for, and for which a Tillotson and a Hoadly, a Watson and a Bathurst, men who have had mitres on their heads, have not hesitated to contend. Yet I must acknowledge, that I find more of this principle of religious liberty in the breasts of protestant dissenters, than in any established church or sect whatever."

The benevolent exertions of the society belonging to the three denominations, and those of the protestant society, have exceeded all calculation. From their own records it appears, that while they have, in almost innumerable instances, protected the guiltless against encroachment and oppression, they have kept alive the spirit of Christian freedom, diffused the noble principles of religious melioration through every part of the united empire, and greatly contributed, in conjunction with existing circumstances, to give and preserve that tone of feeling by which the friends and advocates of religious liberty display their true character. The unusual prevalence of religious liberty in this enlightened age is particularly indebted to the munificent operations of these two institutions, in connexion with the various important occurrences before related.

The fundamental doctrines of protestantism began, during this important period, to be more thoroughly and more generally understood ; it will be necessary, therefore, to furnish the

reader with an epitome of those doctrines, together with their liberalizing influence on the minds of those who espoused them, and on the general state of society.

After the most mature investigation, it has been decisively ascertained, that Christianity is not under the jurisdiction of men in power. From the Saviour's declaration, "My kingdom is not of this world," it has been found that the Gospel stands in no need of human regulation, and that its success is totally independent of the aid of politicians. This declaration manifestly suggests a prohibition to all orders of men not to engage in the futile attempt of incorporating Christianity with their plans of legislation. Men in power are certainly bound to countenance and encourage the Gospel, by making an open profession of it, and by affording secure protection to all its friends against insult and danger; yet they are expressly warned against converting Christian principles into engines of oppression and persecution. "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU." Thus it appears, that religion was not made the subject of human legislation, nor ought the people to acquiesce when human laws interfere with the regal office and spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ. When the civil power assumes the right of settling Christian doctrine, of attaching peculiar privileges to those who will acknowledge that right, and of stigmatizing those whose souls cannot bow to such unhallowed domination, it is extremely clear how all true Christians ought to act. Whilst they most cheerfully obey the laws of the magistrate in all *civil* matters, they are bound by ten thousand obligations to present *the whole of their religious obedience to God*. If this be sedition, we verily are guilty: we will not disguise; we will glory in it.

Another grand doctrine of protestantism clearly understood, is, that "consciences and souls were made to be the Lord's alone." To think and act for ourselves in all the momentous concerns of religion, is considered not as a privilege conceded to weak and tender consciences by the liberality and condescension of a clement prince, or the policy of intelligent statesmen, but as a right born with us, and natural to us. It is the gift of Him who gave us our being. With equal justice might any

human power capriciously destroy our lives, as deny us this liberty ; they might with equal propriety require us to crouch with petitions, soliciting, as an act of favour, permission to live and breathe when our lives have not been forfeited, and our breath is our own, as they could expect us to crave the sanction of human laws to empower us to love and worship our Creator as his word directs, and conscience dictates.

We call this a *natural* gift, which God has indiscriminately bestowed on all the various tribes and members of the human family—liberty of conscience, or the right of private judgment ; and this right is the very basis of protestantism—the soul and principle of all rational religion. To exercise this right ourselves is to maintain uprightness and act like men : but were we so inconsistent and base as to deny it to others, we should degrade them, and treat them like beings of an inferior order ; although reason teaches, and Scripture affirms, that “ God hath made of *one blood* all nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth.” It cannot, therefore, be misunderstood, that every true protestant must and will allow to all others that liberty which, as a protestant, he claims for himself : he will not be angry with others for differing from him, but cheerfully allow them an equal right to the use and liberty of their consciences, as that which he claims for himself. Honest men, with this amiable protestant charity, presently agree in all things necessary ; and the differences which continue among them will do no harm to the general cause of protestants, or to the peace and welfare of civil society.

Men who derive their religion from the Bible, sit loose to those considerations which sway corrupt minds to unscriptural opinions and practices. Under this state of things, no very watchful care of the government is required to keep them in their proper places. Acts of parliament are unnecessary to restrain such persons from riot, sedition, and rebellion : their Bible teaches them, and their conscience convinces them, that they are bound by the authority of God, “ To render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s.” As the principles of religious liberty necessarily recognize the most firm and devout obedience to princes and magistrates in all concerns of a *civil* nature ; so the differences on points of theology will not alienate the minds of those who agree to the only rule of faith and

worship, and who unite in this grand protestant principle, “that every one has an equal right, and is under equal obligation, to judge for himself by that rule.” So far as they behave like protestants, one man will charitably endeavour to inform another wherein he conceives him to err, and the other will as candidly attend to his generous instruction: but neither will entertain a *thought*, though he had it in his power, of murdering, persecuting, or injuring his fellow-protestants, because they happen not to see all things contained in the Bible in exactly the same light. Men have begun to cherish and exercise a far more honourable tone of feeling. They consider that it is high time they should begin to breathe a little of that air which is the only air they expect to breathe by and by—the air of heaven, which is the air of love.

Uniformity in religion, which must be founded on similarity of judgment and equality of knowledge, seems to be absolutely unattainable. While men’s judgments differ, and one man has more knowledge than another, their religious opinions and practice will necessarily vary. In a world like this, where candour, modesty, and forbearance, are reckoned among the amiable Christian virtues, some difference of opinion seems necessary to their exercise; so that a religious uniformity cannot be expected in the church of Christ, until the virtues of the present imperfect state shall be exchanged for the sublimer graces of the celestial and eternal world.

No human power or authority on earth can rectify the existing and unavoidable discordance of religious opinions, by fixing upon any standard of uniformity; nor can this be accomplished without effecting an entire change in the present state and character of man. If we give up the right of private judgment, what can be substituted in its place, “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?” The claims of popery are groundless, arrogant and contradictory, to reason, Scripture, and experience. Can protestants, who disclaim infallibility, propose any plausible centre of union, any particular human standard for the decision of theological controversies, to which they may safely and honourably submit, as men and as Christians? It must be absolutely impossible to fix on any rule, amidst the jarring opinions of persons equally fallible, or come to any other wise and equitable conclusion than this, “To

reject them all." If we set up the opinion of the *majority* as the standard of orthodoxy, we make the rude multitude, who are represented as incapable of cool and impartial examination, equally capable of judging and discriminating as those of the most profound learning, abilities and piety. If we suppose the *civil magistrate* authorized to settle the religion of his subjects, or those who call themselves *the church*, in *conjunction* with the civil power ; this will be no sufficient remedy : the difficulty will still remain. In this case, protestantism or popery, the doctrines of Christ or Mahomet, those of Jews or Pagans, may be established, and, when established, must be received as the true religion. If it be said, that neither the laws of the civil magistrate, nor the decrees of the church, nor both conjointly, are the decisive authority to which submission is required, but only as more likely to judge right than the bulk of the people, who are ignorant, inattentive, and blinded by passion and prejudice ; this is taking away the foundation with one hand, and erecting the superstructure with the other : an authority not decisive, is no authority at all. And if every man have perfect liberty to approve or reject the public doctrines, and forms of worship, as they appear conformable or discordant to his views of Scripture, without suffering the least privation for it, this is the unmolested right of private judgment and unfettered liberty of conscience, given to every man by his Creator : but it supposes, at the same time, that the share which public persons ought to take in promoting religion cannot be called by the name of *authority*, and is only the same as the instructions and persuasions of men in private stations. The common people are, therefore, either absolutely incapable of religion, or they must understand and choose it for themselves.

To those who understand the doctrine of religious liberty, it appears to rest on the same foundation as civil liberty : both are founded in personal property. As civil liberty supposes an inherent right in every person equally to his life, with its comforts and necessities, given him by his Creator, which does not, without forfeiture, depend on the will of any other person ; so religious liberty supposes an inherent right in every person equally to think, and judge, and act for himself, in all matters of faith and worship, according to the abilities and

opportunities which God has given him. On this account it is, that religion is evidently personal property, but different in this respect from civil property, that it cannot in any case whatever be at the disposal of another, be forfeited, or be justly taken away : it is *invisible* property, which respects the mind and conscience, and is subject to God alone, who is judge of all.

This unrestricted Christian freedom being inherent personal property, is inseparable from the very existence of human beings, and is the natural and unalienable birthright of man. If all Christians were conscious of the inestimable value of this privilege, which is born with us, and is the gift of God ; if they would make a proper use and improvement of it, in their researches after truth ; if they would proceed in all their inquiries with unbiased impartiality, and would not be corrupted by irregular passions, perverted by bigotry, enslaved by education, nor controlled by the terrors of human authority :—such open ingenuity of mind, such cool and unfettered examination of religion, would be attended with distinguished advantage to themselves, to Christianity, and to social happiness. If men would venture to claim freedom of thought, with all the rights and privileges of divine worship ; and would venture to make a proper use of their understandings and consciences, they would not be so easily cajoled by every insinuating and bold impostor. But if their understandings and souls are so bribed or terrified as to yield a servile and tame subjection to the impositions of men, to receive implicitly what fallible men have enjoined and transmitted by tradition from their forefathers ; they must of necessity be exposed to endless delusions, to the most stupid and hurtful superstitions, and in imminent danger of being deprived of the use of their senses, as well as of the common principles of humanity. Those, therefore, in every age, who have attempted to enslave the faith and consciences of Christians, have begun by debasing the human intellect, and discouraging its officious inquiries into those things which belong to the priesthood ; well knowing, that, if this light can be obscured, there are no impositions so ridiculous or absurd but they will be greedily swallowed, and no claims so exorbitant or oppressive but they will be devoutly acknowledged by the undiscerning and credulous multitude.

By allowing the people to judge for themselves, and to enjoy without molestation or privation the religion of their own choice, they will of course be more firmly established in the belief and practice of it : whereas an implicit faith and practice, or taking religion, without the toil of examination, from the decrees of princes or prelates, is soon baffled and shaken, and tends to superstition, or infidelity.

If the right of every man to determine for himself what religious doctrines are most agreeable to the Scriptures, and what is the most acceptable method of serving and worshipping God, be not only attended by signal advantage, but the natural and absolute right of every rational creature ; it will follow, as a direct and unavoidable consequence, that all the decrees of councils, proclamations of princes, acts of legislatures, canons of convocations, with all the commands and constitutions of every body of men on earth, requiring religious obedience, are manifestly founded on maxims of injustice and oppression. To deny the claim and exercise of this right, implies a denial that we are intelligent creatures, or accountable to God. Such denial is infamous, and little short of blasphemy, be it ever so speciously coloured. It may be intended to produce obedience to superiors, to create greater reverence for the opinions of antiquity, or to aggrandize the priesthood ; but it is actually betraying the Christian cause, and exposing it to universal contempt.

Men in general have learnt more within the reign of his late majesty, than during any former period. They have more decisively ascertained, that the Gospel frankly recommends to all men the use and improvement of their mental faculties ; that it invites them to strict and sober inquiry after truth ; that the first Christians are applauded for this noble and ingenuous spirit ; that the apostolic exhortation is, “ to prove all things,” and “ to hold fast that which is good ;” and that God requires all men, “ to worship him in spirit and in truth.” From every attempt that is made to bring men under the yoke of spiritual servitude, or to exercise authority and dominion over their faith, we should learn to be more jealous of that invaluable branch of our natural and Christian liberty—the liberty to judge with our own understandings, to believe with our own faith, to be guided in all religious matters by our own

views of Scripture, without which, truth will be oppressed, and Christianity degraded and subverted :—in a word, the liberty of worshipping God according to the light and dictates of our consciences, the loss of which, to a generous mind, is more dreadful than reproach, poverty, or death.

From the different capacities of men, and the early impressions of education, diversities in men's theological opinions are unavoidable ; yet there is one plain and equitable rule furnished by Christian liberty, to prevent all dangerous abuse : “ Keep within the bounds of the written word of God.” This is the only fundamental rule of religion, and of Christians. Men now begin to search into the true meaning of the Scriptures, and faithfully to follow their divine directions, without indulging their ridiculous prejudices, or blindly yielding to the authority of others. They have begun to pursue that course which religious liberty prescribes, and cheerfully to allow all others to do the same. They may believe different or even discordant doctrines ; yet they can agree to live in peace with one another, by which means the great ends of religion and social happiness are conjointly promoted.

It is the indispensable duty of all ranks and orders of men to retract their intolerance, and to practise that lenity and kindness which the Gospel requires. The reformation from popery was a noble instance of retraction in every one who assisted to promote it. Wickliffe and Cobham, Luther and Calvin, Cranmer and Ridley, with all their illustrious train, who first embraced the protestant religion, had formerly been zealous catholics ; but, upon conviction, they retracted what they accounted the errors of popery. Protestants have at length begun to retract their errors, in doctrine, principle, feeling, and practice. All these evils, especially those which are most dangerous to the rights and souls of men, ought to be sacrificed on the altar of Christian truth and peace. It can be no disgrace to any man to renounce his errors, and imbibe the truth ; to reject the bitter and noxious principles of intolerance, and exercise forbearance, compassion, and Christian liberality. These are the happy and honourable dispositions promoted by the unrestricted extension of religious freedom.

“ If the religion of Christ ever resume her ancient lustre, and we are assured by the highest authority she will, it must

be by retracing our steps, by reverting to the original principles, on which, considered as a social institution, it was founded. We must go back to the simplicity of the first ages—we must learn to quit a subtle and disputatious theology, for a religion of love, emanating from a few divinely energetic principles, which pervade almost every page of inspiration, and demand nothing for their cordial reception and belief, besides a humble and contrite heart. Reserving to ourselves the utmost freedom of thought, in the interpretation of the sacred oracles, and pushing our inquiries, as far as our opportunities admit, into every department of revealed truth, we shall not dream of obtruding precarious conclusions on others, as articles of faith; but shall receive with open arms all who appear to ‘love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,’ and find a sufficient bond of union—a sufficient scope for all our sympathies, in the doctrine of the cross.”*

The reformation was founded upon every man’s right to inquire into the meaning of Scripture, and to judge for himself by that rule, wherein consisted the religion of Jesus Christ—what doctrines were to be believed, what worship was to be offered to God, and concerning every thing belonging to faith and salvation. Without the liberty to obey God rather than man, in every thing pertaining to religion, the reformation could not be vindicated: Christ and his apostles must have been offenders; and Christianity itself an innovation. So far, therefore, as men are the enlightened friends of the reformation from popery, they *practically* disavow every principle and every feeling that is hostile to the unlimited right of private judgment, or inconsistent with the holy will of God. As the rejection of intolerance and oppression, and the exercise of the opposite principles, constituted the very basis of the protestant reformation; so the cordial renunciation of all sentiments in religion, which are not supported by the authority of Jesus Christ, ought to be universally countenanced and promoted.

Nothing contributed more to the permanency of the reformation among all judicious persons, than the plain marks of honesty which appeared in those who promoted it: the Reformers gave the most credible evidence that they were honest

* Hall’s Reply, p. 252.

inquirers after truth, and they frankly spoke their minds and altered their opinions, as they thought the Gospel directed, without the bias of secular interest. But those who are now unwilling to retract their mistakes and errors in religion, because they claim great antiquity, or numerous adherents, or great names to sanction them, are evidently opposed both to the principles and the benefits of the reformation, and are upholding a system of slavery to old prejudices far more degrading than even that of the papists, because they are surrounded by much clearer light.

These were the common and baneful errors of many of those who immediately succeeded the Reformers. By them antiquity was venerated, instead of truth, and all discoveries or improvements comparatively modern were deemed of no value. Few persons, during those generations, could distinguish between plain scriptural truth, and those considerations which were drawn from tradition, secularity, law, and custom. Thus, tradition the most absurd, secularity the most infamous, laws the most unjust, and customs the most pernicious, were maintained generation after generation, even by the professed inquirers after truth ! With many persons it was an established principle, questioned only by those who were denominated impudent and heretical, that every thing ancient was good, and that innovation upon the traditions and customs of former times, was of all evils most to be dreaded and deprecated ; but most persons of sober and rational minds in later times have rejected this degrading delusion, and have determined to make use of their own understandings in the search of truth, which God has given them for this purpose, rather than suffer themselves to be drilled and dragooned by the coercive prescriptions of men.

The noblest attempt ever made to rescue mankind from the bondage of error, was the original publication of the Gospel : yet it is well known, with what extreme danger to all who were engaged in the generous design, this light was ushered into the world. By degrees, it became triumphant over Pagan darkness and delusion, and was at length countenanced by the greatest princes in the world. Christianity being advanced to power by its pretended incorporation with the state, its purity was soon miserably corrupted ; and in time the corruption became

so general and so infatuating, that those very weapons which had been employed by the common enemy to destroy Christianity, were employed by Christians to destroy one another, and, awful to relate, they concluded they were doing God service ! They who had upbraided blind Pagans with being guilty of injury and outrage, exercised, with monstrous absurdity, the same violence upon their brethren, who happened to vary in the least degree from the established faith. By this cruel, antichristian practice, the Christian church was reduced to a state of intolerable slavery ; and in this deplorable vassalage she continued upwards of a thousand years, until the glorious era of the reformation, when truth and liberty began once more to dawn upon the nations.

The existence of ecclesiastical impositions is at length found to be incongruous to true religion ; as if Christianity was unable to bear its own weight, but was indebted to foreign aid for its support. We all unite in censuring Mahomet for defending and propagating his religion by methods of coercion ; and we even consider this as no weak argument to prove the prophet an impostor, and his religion a fabrication. We see the disgrace of employing these measures in defence of Christianity. In most of our learned refutations of the deists, we have advanced this as an unanswerable proof of the divinity of our holy religion, that it is so far from receiving any aid from the secular power, that, by its own internal evidence, it prevails and triumphs even when that power is engaged in violent opposition against it. Shall we then proclaim abroad that this argument was a deception and a prevarication, and thus bring Christianity under strong suspicion, by supporting it by the use of compulsive measures, similar to those of the eastern impostor ? No ; the founders of the Gospel never recommended Christians to seize the property, imprison the persons, or inflict temporal punishment on the enemies of Jesus Christ. Such cruel proceedings disgrace and subvert religion, and promote infidelity and wickedness.

The first Reformers, whatever faults they might have, do not seem to have been infected with any great degree of priestcraft, or to have entertained any high notions of their own spiritual dignity and authority. Episcopacy was not considered as necessary to the existence of Christian churches : and though

many of the foreign protestant churches rejected episcopacy, they were regarded as sisters ; their ministers were embraced as brethren : and the ordinances they dispensed were esteemed equally valid as their own. This order of things was afterwards reversed. The church of Rome, represented by the Reformers as “ the whore of Babylon and the mother of harlots,” was afterwards considered as a virgin espoused to Christ ; her sons were embraced as brethren, and their ministry and services accounted valid, because they had been ordained by the hands of a bishop ! while all the unbishoped churches were disowned as a spurious breed, and their ministers were said to be in “ pretended holy orders.”

To persuade the episcopal dignitaries that their office had a peculiar measure of spiritual sanctity annexed to it, and that no other religionists were entitled to the smallest portion, was so flattering to the pride of human nature, that no strength of argument was required to produce the belief of it. These delusions continued with augmented efficacy during the reigns of king Charles and king James ; when the pretensions to priestly power were carried to a point far beyond any thing since the reformation. The dignified clergy improved even upon Laud ; and, like those who fancy themselves the peculiar favourites of heaven, they wished to enjoy all the benefit themselves, by excluding every other sect. One thing particularly observable in the views of these high-toned ecclesiastics, and which they did not fail to promote, was the dignity of the episcopal clergy, “ by an uninterrupted and unbroken succession from the apostles.”

Let the nature and grounds of this singular claim be fairly examined. When queen Elizabeth appointed Dr. Parker to the archbishopric of Canterbury, the whole bench of bishops, who opposed the formation of the present ecclesiastical establishment, refused to consecrate him. Not one of them would take any part in this business. The persons who consecrated Parker, had been deposed and degraded from the episcopal office, and, consequently, had no episcopal power remaining. Their coming forwards at the archiepiscopal consecration was, according to the very laws of the church, and the grounds of the pretended succession, a mere assumption ; on which account, their episcopal acts were null and void : how then shall we trace the uninterrupted and unbroken succession ?

To provide a remedy against this evil, at so distant a period as *seven years* afterwards, an act of parliament was passed to secure the validity of his grace's consecration ! This, according to my author, was *very necessary*, for the confirmation of his consecration, and that of all the bishops, as well as the ordination of all the clergy, consequent upon it.* Here the validity of Parker's consecration, and consequently the consecration of all the bishops and ordination of all the clergy in England, was made to rest on an act of parliament, and not on any official descent from the apostles. What then became of the unbroken apostolical succession ? But, if this first consecration was not apostolically valid in itself, and at the time it was performed, how could an act of parliament, seven years afterwards, give it apostolical virtue ? This is the root and origin of protestant episcopacy in England.

The Romanists declare that the bishops of the church of England are not possessed of apostolical authority, having lost all claims and pretensions to it by her schismatical separation from the mother church. The church of Rome is considered as the only apostolical church, possessing apostolical laws and authority. Her bishops are accounted the successors of the apostles. The patrons of uninterrupted succession strenuously maintain, that the church of Rome possesses the unbroken succession ; that she enjoys the essentials of faith ; and that "*the whole of Christianity* is actually contained in the Romish religion." From this origin the pretended episcopal succession is derived. But mark the consequence. Since the church of Rome is thus acknowledged to be an apostolical church, possessing the essentials of faith and discipline, and capable of preserving the holy succession, unbroken and undefiled, separation from her communion, on the principles of churchmen, is incapable of any just defence. The church of England cannot justify her separation on the ground of faith, or on the ground of discipline. On her own principles, she is a convicted schismatic ! an unjustifiable separatist ! a renouncer of apostolical authority ! Hence the church of England, in her contests with the Romanists, denies and rejects her apostolical authority and jurisdiction, as a vain assumption ; but when

* Strype's Life of Abp. Parker, p. 61.

her patrons in modern times attempt to prove their uninterrupted succession from the apostles, and thus acquit themselves of the charge of schism, they change sides, and lay hold of the apostolical authority of the popish church. In these two controversies they place themselves in a singularly awkward dilemma. When they contend with catholics, they renounce the authority of the Romish church ; but when they contend with protestant dissenters, to prove them all schismatics, and all their ministers unauthorized, they take their stand on that authority even as apostolical, and thence maintain their unbroken succession from the apostles !

Nothing can, however, be more palpably absurd, than to style the English bishops, the successors of the apostles. The arrogant and mysterious title is calculated to astonish and confound ignorant and superstitious people ; but they might, with equal propriety, style them the successors of the old Jewish doctors ; and since queen Elizabeth claimed and exercised the sole power of making bishops, those whom she furnished with the episcopal office, power and jurisdiction, were successors of the queen, not of the apostles. One would naturally suppose that whenever a vacancy occurred in the episcopal body, the supposed successors of the apostles would look out for some holy man, whom they might associate to themselves, and appoint to the vacant office : but the bishops of the church of England have no part in procuring or electing their colleagues and successors. The formal appointment is in other hands. No sooner is a bishop dead, or deposed from his high office, than a successor is nominated and appointed by an authoritative commission from the supreme magistrate ; and all that afterwards follows is mere form. The man is henceforth made a bishop, and all the bishops and people in England cannot unmake him ; though the king or queen can do it at pleasure. This, by an appeal to indubitable fact, is the true origin of episcopal succession. It is manifestly a succession from the king or queen of England, and not by any unbroken line from the apostles.

One inquiry yet remains : What does episcopal ordination actually convey ? Are all persons ordained by a bishop made, *ipso facto*, true ministers of Jesus Christ ? Does this ceremony convey genius, or talents, or wisdom, or piety, or spiritual gifts of any description ? What are the advantages of episcopal or-

dination? Is it not marvellous that we should be expected to admire those men, as the very successors of the apostles, who are admitted into the public ministry, though often destitute of Christian knowledge, uninfluenced by Christian principles, unholy in their conversation, and notorious for the love of the world and the neglect of souls? Are all these true ministers of Jesus Christ, and apostolically descended! while Doddridge, Watts, and multitudes of the same class, are mere impostors! Are the former approved by the doctrine and practice of the apostles, and the latter frowned and rejected by them? The determination of these great inquiries will shortly appear at the tribunal of God.

This uninterrupted and unbroken succession, is a point of no importance whatever, and is given up as extremely doubtful by all who have examined the subject with minute and unbiased attention; and even so high an authority as Stillingfleet rests it on the slender ground of *mere presumption*. “Although, by the loss of records of the British churches,” says he, “we *cannot* draw down the succession of bishops from the apostles; for that of the bishops of London by Jocelin of Furnes is not worth mentioning; yet we have great reason to *presume* such a succession.”*

To raise the clamorous cry of heresy, or schism, or the danger of the church; and to call the aid of ecclesiastical thunders and the secular power, will never confute heresies, remove schisms, and promote the safety of the church. The only proper or even possible method of doing this, is by securing the most perfect liberty to all, and allowing every man to follow peaceably the convictions of his own mind, although he may not measure his religion by human prescriptions. It will, at the same time, be perfectly right and commendable to use our most vigorous efforts to recover men from their errors, by sound argument and friendly persuasion. This is the only method to be used among Christians; and no other will ever succeed.

No man will avow himself a persecutor; the character is too odious to be openly assumed. Coercive measures may be disclaimed, and a softening language may be used; but whoever charges criminality upon others, solely on the ground of their

* Stillingfleet's *Antiq.* p. 77.

separation from the established church, and censures that system of freedom which protects all Christians in the full exercise of their religious rights, has already passed the bounds of Christian integrity, and given his voice in favour of restraints on conscience. He does not, indeed, burn men at the stake, nor hang them on the gallows ; but he has betrayed the spirit of intolerance, and placed himself in the ranks with those who persecute the church of God. How different were the sentiments and the practice of the king of Persia, a blind Pagan or Mahometan, who lately issued the following declaration, in behalf of his Christian subjects, who had been abused for their religion ? “ It is my pleasure, that every nation in my states, *be their religion what it may, shall enjoy true liberty*, and live in peace under the shelter of my sovereign authority.”

In every country where unrestricted religious freedom is allowed and secured by law, there ought to be the utmost care not to abuse it. The liberty of thinking and judging for ourselves, necessarily supposes the liberty of showing our reasons for it. A man may, therefore, set his own opinions in the clearest light ; worship God in that way which appears to him most profitable ; and defend both his opinions and his practice by the strongest arguments in his power. He may lay open the weakness or absurdity of the opposite sentiments ; and such conduct is not to be censured, but commended. All this is reasonable, and perfectly consistent with Scripture ; with which no one can, in justice, feel in the least offended. It is unreasonable, as well as unscriptural, to use reproachful language, or to manage disputes with an air of insolence : this looks too much like a fondness for that authority which religious liberty utterly disclaims. They who insolently despise authority when it is *against* them, are likely to stretch it beyond its proper bounds, if they ever get it into their own hands. Modesty is essential to Christian decorum. Banter and ridicule have the appearance of great arrogance, and are no more within the protection of religious liberty, than rudeness and ill manners are within that of civil freedom. The liberty of thinking and judging for ourselves was never intended to patronize a liberty to act without thought or judgment. This would be to retain the glorious name of liberty, as a cloak to licentiousness of thought and practice ; or, to bring ourselves into the vilest servitude to our passions and our lusts.

The claim of religious freedom will never countenance a turbulent, seditious humour. This claim is found to be much more just and consistent than to serve the cause of disobedience, by libeling and defaming the government; or that of resistance, by riot and rebellion. That must be an unreasonable license which disturbs every man's liberty; by sowing faction, spreading discontent, overturning the very bulwark of liberty, and destroying the peace and good order of society. It is a point of the highest political wisdom, in every government, to secure to all its subjects perfect liberty of conscience, and, at the same time, to erect a bulwark against the licentious abuse of this liberty; while the highest honour and happiness of the people is secured by their firmly claiming the one, and their devout subjection to the other. History furnishes many instructive lessons on this point.

Some, under pretence of liberty, have indulged the warmest passion for power and dominion. They would be released from all authority, that nothing might hinder their assuming authority over others. They wish to have all things placed on a level, that they may have the better opportunity of acting the part of tyrants. Some to avoid the mischiefs of anarchy, have tamely put on the chains of slavery: and others, so affrighted with tyranny, have outstretched the bounds of liberty, and run into tumult and confusion. These extremes are to be cautiously avoided both by the government and the people; but the permanent guarantee of perfect religious freedom is the only sure remedy against all these evils.

No man can, with justice, represent religious freedom as friendly to political animosity; and the conduct of those who are guilty of such misrepresentation and abuse, deserves universal reprobation, as illiberal, injurious, and unchristian. The meekness, gentleness, and forbearance of Christ, we may venture to predict, never taught them to represent any class of conscientious Christians as enemies to social peace. It has been the fate of the best Christians in all ages, who have opposed the reigning corruptions, to be traduced as sectaries and fanatics. The apostles and first Christians were stigmatized by the Jews as "a sect every where spoken against," and as "turning the world upside down." In our own country, ever since the days of Wickliffe, the same stigma has been cast upon those who

could not embrace the religion of the state: but the days are passing away, and we hope they will soon be gone, when no class of men will attempt to serve the cause of religion by slander and misrepresentation.

Correct views of religious liberty afford unspeakable advantage to purity of doctrine and worship: but restraint is equally beneficial to error and corruption. If men were allowed, without control, to judge and act for themselves, admitting they were deceived, they would deceive themselves alone: but when millions of people must be determined by one person, or by a few persons, the error may be epidemical and ruinous. If men must submit to the authority of the church, they must believe, or at least profess they believe, as the church believes, and practise what the church enjoins, though it be ever so ridiculous or absurd. Private judgment would, in this case, be exploded, and the rights of conscience annihilated. This could only be the policy of a false church, or, a church erected upon an erroneous foundation: upon the wisdom of men, not the truth and power of God.

Liberty has been accused of leading men to licentiousness. The accusation is altogether without foundation. The consequence here alleged is not produced by liberty, but by its enemies and opposers. Usurpation and oppression have a necessary connexion with hypocrisy and injustice: they reward hypocrisy with preferment, and punish sincerity with torment. This is the licentiousness which is ascribed to liberty, but which is evidently produced by tyranny. It is proved from the most faithful historical records, that oppressors have, in all ages, committed their depredations upon the best subjects in the land, and then ascribed licentiousness to those innocent and harmless persons whom they have persecuted. It is now too late to father such degrading delusions on mankind.

Britain assumes a lofty eminence above other nations. Notwithstanding the prevalence of scepticism and other abominations, the number of religious persons is very great, and the means of instruction are multiplying daily. By the increase of public seminaries, and the institution of schools for educating the children of the poor, the happiest results may be anticipated, both as to the morals of the people, and the prosperity of the state. So strong has been the impulse to promote the

education of the lower classes, that the great cause of religion and of melioration cannot fail to be advanced. It is a favourable sign of the present times, that so many persons of rank and influence are coming forwards to patronize schemes for emancipating the human mind, and other works of charity. Humanity has long sighed over the brutal ignorance among the lower orders of the community. In providing means for its removal, the national character rises in excellence, and provides for the future welfare of society. No former age has been so distinguished as the present, for the number of societies for the diffusion of religious truth, and for the maintenance of social order. These occurrences have mixed the various classes of Christians together; have brought them much nearer to each other; and kindled that holy zeal which has been productive of the most salutary effects. The bigotry of former times seems hastening to an extinction, and the improvement that has taken place in public opinion warrants the conclusion, that, at no distant period, religious distinctions in the state will be considered as unnecessary as they are illiberal and unjust.

Among the important benefits resulting from the unexampled operations of the British and Foreign Bible Society, it has re-opened our communications with nearly all nations, in the character of fellow Christians, and re-kindled our sympathies, in some degree, for the religious improvement of all people. It has developed the real state of religion, by presenting a test of Christian zeal and protestant consistency, and has made us better acquainted, than we could otherwise have been, with the deplorable state of religious knowledge, so generally prevalent, at home and abroad.

By the remarkable exertions of this institution, divine Providence seems to have raised up the only adequate remedy for the awful ignorance and irreligion which it has brought to light. In this view it is certainly regarded by multitudes of pious foreigners, who recognise it as a sure token of the merciful interposition of the great Head of the church, for preventing the utter decay of true religion, and the total extinction of the reformation in those countries where it first commenced. In the simplicity of its plan, and in the singleness of its object, it has furnished the broad basis for the universal

combination of Christian agency ; and, since it appears to be the only scheme commensurate to the vast sphere of exertion opened to us, it was the only practicable means by which, without exciting political and ecclesiastical jealousies, the instrumentality of Britain could have employed to accomplish a *second* reformation of the Christian world. Its singular adaptation to this great object, has been demonstrated by the wonderful results which have already attended its mighty progress.

The unexampled spirit of union and co-operation which has been excited for disseminating the only fundamental principle of the reformation, “ the unsophisticated and exclusive authority of the Bible,” is doing more for the liberation of mankind from spiritual thralldom, than all the theories and speculations devised by man. This is the lightning from heaven, that will set fire to the hay and stubble of human opinions ; and will consume, as with the breath of the Almighty, all the systems of false religion, and all those corruptions of the true, which curtail or deteriorate its benignant effects. When the diversified professions of religion shall be reduced to this standard, we shall witness the rapid and extensive melioration of Britain and the whole earth ; we shall then see in full play, before the eyes of an admiring world, that great engine which will overturn the kingdom of darkness. When this glorious period shall arrive, that narrow, antichristian policy, which would abridge the reading, limit the circulation, or *engross the interpretation*, of the sacred Volume, and would lead men back to the darkness and slavery of the middle ages, will be swept away in one common wreck.

This is a summary of the doctrines of protestantism, and of their beneficial influence on the principles and practice of those who have espoused them. The prevalence of these doctrines, and their meliorating power on all branches of the community, have been more diffusively and happily recognised under the mild government of king George the Third, than at any period since the dawn of the reformation. The principles of religious liberty begin to be more distinctly and extensively understood, and no wonder can exist why they are so thoroughly appreciated by persons of sober and pious minds. As they comprehend the foregoing important doctrines, they give man his proper dignity as a rational and accountable creature ; yet fix every man in his proper station in society.

This beneficial influence, it ought to be recollected, has not been confined to any one particular sect of Christians, nor even to those who have embraced the doctrine and cultivated the spirit of freedom ; but these philanthropic operations have extended to all ranks and orders of men. The doctrine and spirit of freedom prompt those who espouse them to promote the present and future happiness of mankind at large ; and, while they inspire them with this Christian sympathy and generous practice, tens of thousands, directly or indirectly, share their diffusive melioration. The secure enjoyment of civil and religious liberty constitutes the grand bond of society, and gives to a nation union and strength, power and wealth, peace and prosperity. The vast superiority of Britain over the other nations of Europe, is principally owing to the liberality of her constitution, and that large share of freedom which she secures to all her worthy subjects. May she learn to appreciate and extend this great national benefit more and more, and perpetuate this invaluable blessing to all future generations !

The patrons of religious liberty will not yield to any class in ardent attachment to the *civil* constitution of their country. By a firm adherence to their principles, and the scrupulous integrity of their practice, they have uniformly testified their unrivalled allegiance to their reigning prince. Before the close of this history, it will be indispensably necessary to pay a tribute of affectionate respect to the character and memory of our late venerable and revered sovereign ; who was the oldest, and probably the most beloved, of all the monarchs that have sat on the British throne ; and whose reign has surpassed, both in length and interest, that of any of his predecessors. The leading features in his character were dignified firmness and amiable clemency, the rare qualities of princes. In domestic life he was an affectionate husband, a kind father, a gentle master, a constant and faithful friend :—in his personal character he was strictly moral, uniformly amiable, and devoutly religious. As related in the foregoing pages, one of the first public acts of his majesty's reign was his declaration to preserve the toleration inviolable, and one of the last his decisive regulation of toleration in the West India colonies. After a seclusion of nine years from his family and his people, in a state of blindness and mental derangement, our venerable monarch

died at Windsor Castle, on Saturday the 29th of January, 1820, in the eighty-second year of his age, and the *sixtieth* of his reign. The king was no bigot. He loved and cherished good men who belonged to the episcopal church established in the south, or to the presbyterian church established in the north. The dissenters had their religious privileges repeatedly extended during his majesty's reign; and to his memory and his family they feel the most sincere and cordial attachment. "God forbid," said the king to lord Mansfield, "that religious difference of opinion should sanction persecution, or admit of one man within my realms suffering unjustly." His majesty knew that a number of his domestics constantly attended public worship among the dissenters, and he approved of their conduct, wishing them to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences.

On Monday the 31st of January, the prince of Wales, who had executed the high office of regent for nine years, was proclaimed GEORGE THE FOURTH. His majesty, immediately on his accession, made this declaration in council:—"The experience of the past will, I trust, satisfy all classes of my people, that it will ever be my most anxious endeavour to promote their prosperity and happiness, and to maintain unimpaired the *religion, laws, and liberties* of the kingdom." To the address of the deputation of the three denominations, consisting of eighty-nine dissenting ministers, presented to the king upon his accession, his majesty, in addition to other tokens of kindness and affection, returned the following most gracious answer:—"I receive with great satisfaction this loyal and dutiful address. The justice which you have rendered to the memory of my beloved father, is highly gratifying to me. You may be fully assured of the continuance of that protection which you experienced during his beneficent reign, and my determination to maintain strictly, and inviolably, the toleration now so happily enjoyed." This enlightened declaration from the throne will gladden the hearts of all the friends of religion and religious freedom; will bind as with adamant their affectionate attachment to his majesty's person and government; will constrain them to express their unfeigned thankfulness to God, and to pray that his majesty may reign many years in the affections of all his subjects, and afterwards receive a crown and a kingdom that will never fade away.

The Gospel strongly inculcates gentleness, goodness, and brotherly-kindness towards all parties ; and, under the influence of these necessary Christian tempers, we wish to behold Christianity replaced on its primitive and only proper foundation. With minds widely expanded by divine truth, the friends of religious liberty feel no antipathy—no hostility against the episcopal church. May her altars, and her temples remain inviolate ! May all her ministers be clothed with grace and salvation ! They do not feel the least degree of hostility against any denomination of Christians, but earnestly wish and devoutly pray for the prosperity of all. With minds thus expanded, their principles, their consciences, and their Bibles inculcate the exercise of universal philanthropy ; and they feel joyfully constrained to raise their hearts and voices in behalf of every Christian communion, saying—“ O Lord, we beseech thee send now prosperity.” With minds thoroughly liberalized, they long to see the church of England, and every other church in Christendom, released from the fetters of secularity and human legislation, and built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, having Jesus Christ for the chief corner-stone. They reflect, with unfeigned thankfulness to God, that, in the established church, the flame of holy zeal has been rekindled from the dying embers ; that the doctrines of evangelical truth are so extensively published by her ministers ; that numerous converts to Christ are added to her communion. They cherish no other rivalry, than that holy emulation which will mutually provoke to “ love and to good works ;” they wish her no worse a calamity than to be founded on apostolic truth, and crowned with the benediction of God.

The impartial historian always feels great pleasure in recording the advancement of true religion among any denomination of Christians ; this pleasure he enjoys in bearing a favourable testimony of its improved state in the church of England, during the reign of our late venerable monarch. The deplorable state of the church in the former period, and the pleasing change which took place in this reign, are thus described by one of her most venerable clergy : “ The times are dark (in 1797) but perhaps they were darker in England sixty years ago, when, though we had peace and plenty, the bulk of the kingdom lay

under the judgment of an unregenerate ministry, and the people were perishing for lack of knowledge. In this respect the times are better than they were. The Gospel is preached in many parts; we have it plentifully in London; and many of our great towns, which were once sitting in darkness, have now the true light. Some of these places were as a wilderness in my remembrance, and now are as the gardens of the Lord. Every year the Gospel is planted in fresh places—ministers are still rising up—the work is still spreading. I am not sure that in the year 1740, there was a single parochial minister who was publicly known as a Gospel minister in the whole kingdom! Now we have, I know not how many, but I think not less than four hundred!*" Within the last twenty years, the increase of zealous evangelical clergy has greatly augmented their number; and by their active and faithful labours, a spirit of piety has been greatly diffused among the various ranks of society.

The state of religion among the dissenters in general, during this reign, has been eminently prosperous. The number and respectability of their congregations, with the manifest and extensive revival of religion, have progressively increased. They have been roused to zealous and vigorous exertions in the promulgation of the Gospel, at home and in foreign countries. These exertions have been accompanied, to a large extent, with the smiles and blessing of God, by which the most important benefits have been conferred on the Christian church and the world. Their number, respectability, piety, and usefulness have been signally manifest, especially during the last forty or fifty years, and much more conspicuous than at any former period.

The amazing progress of Gospel light and truth in general—the spirit of activity which of late has been exerted to promote the Redeemer's glory, and to erect his kingdom in the hearts of men—the multiplied institutions for the diffusion of the knowledge of Christ throughout the earth—the vast number of faithful witnesses rising up to bear their testimony to the Gospel at home—and the readiness of multitudes to devote themselves to the conversion of the heathen abroad:—All these considerations proclaim an era signally auspicious to the pro-

* Newton's Remarks, p. 76.

mulgation of evangelical religion, and the more extensive spread of undefiled Christianity, than any former ages have presented to our view.

This, however, is only the morning spread upon the mountains ; but “ the Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in his wings.” Deploring the wide-spreading ravages of infidel opinions ; the eager pursuit of dissipation which abounding wealth affords ; the worldly tempers engendered by great commercial engagements ; and the manifest irreligion of many among the rich, the mighty, and the noble ; yet, thanks be to God, there are found in the midst of us, hosts of active and pious Christians, who have the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ supremely at heart, and are willing to spend and be spent to promote this glorious cause. At no period, therefore, since the reformation, has there been so liberalized a tone of feeling among the various classes of Christians, so diffusive a knowledge of the word of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so zealous a disposition to extend its influence and its benefits through every corner of the land, and to all the ends of the earth. The light of the glorious Gospel, which has begun to shine, must shine “ more and more unto the perfect day.”

CONCLUSION,

Stating the Nature and Advantage of Religious Emancipation.

INDEPENDENT thinking is always painful, and seldom brought into active operation. It is so much more easy to read than to think, and to refer to the opinions of other men than to form and sustain any opinions of our own, that the love of mental ease may be justly considered as one chief occasion of the errors which prevail in the world. This has unhappily been the case, for many generations, and to a most pernicious extent, especially in matters relating to the churches of Jesus Christ. Divines read, then wrote, then published ; but rarely thought and decided independently for themselves. By this means errors the most delusive and dangerous have been handed down from age to age, perhaps with some trivial alterations or em-

bellishments, but without any examination of the grounds on which they rested, or any attempt to reduce them to those primitive truths which alone can impart value and permanence. Thus men's understandings have been debilitated by injurious habits; truth and error have been confounded; fraud and hypocrisy have prevailed through all ranks of society, to the great injury of the nation, the disgrace of religion, and the danger of immortal souls.

The patrons of ecclesiastical power constantly speak of men at large, as persons to be governed, instead of considering them as beings to be instructed and saved. Their erroneous notions of the true nature and ends of Christianity, are of dangerous consequence both to religion and religious freedom. Viewing the people as placed under certain modifications of political government, they conclude that they are to be ruled, and guided, and commanded, all along the way to heaven. They admit in *theory*, that the salvation of man is the end of the Gospel, that faith in the Son of God is the means of promoting it, that the preaching of the Gospel, provided it be under certain political restrictions, is the instrument of their salvation: but this they subvert by the secularity of their notions of Christianity, and the coercive measures which they employ for its promulgation in the world.

The want of a proper distinction between the church and the state, has occasioned the greatest confusion in men's conceptions and discussions on all subjects relating to ecclesiastical polity. They are two societies perfectly separate and distinct from each other, in their nature and constitution, their laws and government, their objects and ends. One is a civil or political society, instituted wholly for the security of men's persons and estates against depredation and injury: the other is a religious or spiritual society, instituted, according to the laws and maxims of Scripture, for promoting an open profession of religion and the public worship of God—for the religious instruction of the people, and the salvation of their souls. The concerns of the state are wholly regulated by the wisdom and prescriptions of the legislature: but all the affairs of the church are under the superintendence of God, and regulated by his unerring wisdom as revealed in his holy word. The statute-book contains the laws and maxims of the state; the Bible

contains the whole of the Christian religion. Heaven and earth are not more distinct than these two societies are in their nature, institution, administration, and ends; yet how have they been blended and confounded by ancient custom, to the inconceivable injury both of church and state!

The two societies, when attempted to be incorporated, naturally tend to destroy each other. On the one hand, if the doctrines and worship of the church must be enforced by civil penalties, the church must at all times receive its doctrines and regulate its worship by the political decrees of the state, which would destroy the very nature of a Christian church, and transform it into a political institution: and, on the other, if the state give up its jurisdiction to the church, to be directed and employed according to her sovereign decrees, this would overthrow and destroy the state. But, to consider them every way distinct will effectually preserve to each its indubitable rights, without the least prejudice to each other, or clashing among themselves. A due attention to these distinctions will help to settle the just principle of religious freedom, with respect to both church and state.

We are all aware that the social compact into which we enter in this life will be dissolved by death. When this life shall be over, we shall not be able to claim any of the privileges of Englishmen; we shall not be bound by any of the laws of England, nor shall we owe any allegiance to its sovereign. When, therefore, our situation in a future life shall have no connexion with our privileges or obligations as Englishmen, why should those persons who make laws for Englishmen at all interfere with those affairs which relate exclusively to a future state, and to which their power to legislate does not, cannot extend?

There is something in the nature of religion that places it beyond the province of the civil magistrate to intermeddle with it. The duties of religion, which we owe to God, and the proper disposition to observe them, which we receive from God, when properly understood, will appear incompatible with the interference of the civil power. If, for instance, we be commanded by divine authority to *search the Scriptures*, and the magistrate forbids us the use of them, how can we discharge our duty to God, without disobeying the civil power? For the same reason, the authority of the magistrate is opposed to that

of God, in all those cases in which human laws impede the use of our faculties and energies in the cause of religion.

It is certainly contrary to all ideas of a divine religion, to suppose that civil magistrates embracing Christianity have, therefore, a power of making laws for the Christian church, of enforcing the observance of them by sanctions altogether unsuitable to its nature, and thus of new-modelling the religion of Jesus Christ. The idea cannot be admitted without supposing a total change in the very first principles and essentials of Christianity. If civil penalties be introduced into the church of Christ, it is changed into a political institution—a kingdom of this world. Its governors then assume a kind of power over men's persons and property, totally unknown in the divine institution of the Gospel. When the civil magistrate takes upon him to prescribe creeds and confessions of faith, what is it but to usurp dominion over the faith of Christians, a power which the apostles expressly disclaimed and prohibited? If, therefore, any private Christian should differ in religious opinions from those invested with civil power, he cannot consider himself as under any more obligation to submit to them in such matters, than to the religious impositions of Mahometans or Pagans. A conscientious Christian will never hesitate about obeying God rather than man, though he should be a magistrate, and a Christian; because he assumes authority in things divine, without divine commission.

Any other maxims than these, it is evident, might be attended with the total subversion of Christianity; by alterations and additions according to the pleasure of those in power, till it was made essentially different in all points from the Divine original. In all cases when the civil magistrate claims power and authority in religion, it is by the formation of new laws and inflicting temporal penalties; but new laws and temporal penalties are absolutely inapplicable and impertinent in the government of Christianity: such laws and penalties can be employed only in the government of the state. When a Christian magistrate pretends to make laws for the Christian church, he is to be considered as adopting the most effectual measures to subvert Christianity, and to set up something else in its place, more or less like it, as it may happen: but whatever that is which is thus substituted in its place, since it rests wholly on

the policy and authority of man, it cannot, without the grossest violation of truth, be called Christianity. It can only be called a civil or political institution.

Whenever the civil magistrate, in consequence of becoming a member of the church, attempts to incorporate Christianity into his system of civil policy, he introduces into the Gospel such laws and sanctions as are evidently opposed unto it, and subversive of it. When, for instance, instead of voluntary contributions to the support of the church, he appoints the compulsory payment of church dues ; and when, in the place of exhortation and reproof, he substitutes fines and confiscations, this new-modelled scheme cannot be called Christianity. In all such cases, there is a change in the fundamental maxims of government, or a change both in the laws, and in the sanctions annexed to them, which certainly proves that there is a change in the constitution : so every attempt to establish our holy religion on the ground of human laws, and by the force of penal sanctions, tends directly to the subversion of Christianity, by transforming it into a political institution.

Had it been the proper office of the civil magistrate to appoint new laws and new penalties for religious government, and had it been unlawful for private persons to attempt any alteration of religion, except by application to the civil governor ; is it not unaccountable, that our Lord and his apostles never made any proposals to the supreme magistrates among the Jews, or the Romans ? They certainly had no idea of any peculiar obligation on magistrates to choose and prescribe a religion for the people, since we never hear of their making application to them for such purpose. It was their constant custom to preach the Gospel to all companies, and to invite all persons promiscuously to worship God ; while nearly all the intercourse they had with magistrates, seems to have been their appearance before them as criminals, when their religion was their only crime.

Our Lord sent his twelve apostles among all the cities of Israel, but we do not read of his sending any deputation to the rulers of the Jews. John the Baptist seems to have confined his preaching to the wilderness of Judea, and the neighbourhood of the river Jordan ; where he gave his exhortations to all who came to him, without distinction of persons. Paul,

indeed, made an appeal to Cæsar; but it was in the cause of liberty, and to obtain his release from an unjust prosecution. We are not informed that any of the apostles ever sought to have Christianity incorporated with the state, or have it made the religion of the empire; which many persons have supposed the readiest and best method of christianizing the world. On the contrary, the whole of their conduct shows, that they considered religion as the proper and immediate concern of every individual person; and that, in cases of this nature, there was no occasion whatever to consult or advise with any earthly superior.

One circumstance in favour of this representation is very evident. If the support of Christianity had not been undertaken by Constantine, or any of the Roman governors, the popish hierarchy, that great *mystery of iniquity* and *abomination*, could never have existed. By the ostentatious assumption of human legislation in religion, Christianity was made the tool of secular aggrandizement and a worldly empire; the liberal constitution of the primitive church and the rights of conscience were subverted; and, for upwards of a thousand years, the souls of the people were deluded and destroyed by this odious domination. All the advocates of church power will not be able to mention any evil attending the want of ecclesiastical establishments, of equal magnitude to this, which flowed from the usurpation of the church of Rome. It ought also to be understood, that all other ecclesiastical establishments partake more or less of the nature of this, the first and greatest of them, being only corrections and amendments of it; yet all are built on the same foundation—the policy and power of man, not the wisdom and power of God.

The imposition of human creeds, confessions and forms of worship, precludes the free investigation of theological subjects, and entails errors and abuses from generation to generation; so that a reformation can hardly take place without violence and blood. If the emoluments of the church be considerable, the temptation to prevaricate is almost irresistible. What must the people think, when they see those who are appointed to instruct them in the principles of religion and the way to heaven, solemnly subscribing to articles of faith which they are known to disbelieve and abhor? And who among the

thousands of the clergy, that think and judge for themselves, can be supposed to believe all the articles they subscribe ?

The temporal penalties inseparable from ecclesiastical establishments, are open innovations and derangements of Christianity. All that the New Testament authorizes a Christian church to do with offenders, is admonition and exclusion from their society, those persons whom they, according to Scripture, deem unworthy members. There is no intimation that such excluded members must be placed under any civil disqualification. If they cannot be considered as *Christians*, and proper members of Christian societies ; they still are *men*, proper members of civil society, and not liable to any temporal penalties, unless they have offended against the laws of the state. The horrid sentence of excommunication according to the church of England, was not introduced till about the fifth century, when it was brought by the barbarous Celtes and other Germanic nations, from their druidical religion ; which was in many respects analogous to that of the Hindoos.

The Jewish economy was purely a theocracy, intended as a barrier of separation between the Jews and the Gentiles. But this barrier was broken down by the coming of the Messiah ; and now both parties, on the profession of the Gospel, are united in one common faith. This new economy proposes more sublime and exalted motives than those proposed by the Mosaic law. In the place of temporal rewards and temporal punishments, it has substituted those which are invisible and eternal. It treats no part of the human family as strangers. It knows no enemies. It opens a door of mercy to all—offers its blessings to the acceptance of all, without human compulsions or temporal punishments. It presents its delicious, heavenly fruits equally and indiscriminately to all ranks of men ; but never sanctions their forcing one another to pluck and eat. Jesus Christ never said, “ Whoever does not follow me, shall be considered as a rebel against the state—shall be unprotected by the laws of his country—shall be doomed to a dungeon, bear a fagot, or be stripped of any part of his worldly property.” The religion which he taught was matter of individual choice. “ Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.” When many of his professed disciples forsook him, he did not use any outward compulsion to prevent them ; but,

with his wonted gentleness, said to the rest, " Will ye also go away ?" It is in vain, therefore, to boast of our freedom, or even of our religion, so long as admission to ecclesiastical offices, the discharge of ministerial duties, the doctrines to be received, the prayers to be offered to God, the qualifications for Christian communion, and multiplied other particulars, are under the regulation of penal statutes, or any other devices of man.

The religion of Jesus Christ is a system of charity and melioration. The Son of God has not given to those whom he has charged with the commission of propagating and extending his religion, any authority to make converts by the use of penal force, or any other instruction than that of imitating his zeal, his patience, his charity towards all mankind. He has furnished them with no other means of making proselytes to his religion, besides persuasion, prayer, and a good example. All coercive measures, and all temptations to secular interest, are therefore excluded from the Christian code ; and all attempts to promote religion by such devices, have a direct tendency to destroy Christianity, and to promote a worldly system, founded on human policy. Coercion and secularity are not spiritual, but carnal weapons, and consequently are unsuitable to be employed in this holy warfare ; and in proportion as they are called into operation for the establishment of Christianity, they tend directly to overthrow it, and to establish some other discordant system in its place. To allow the magistrate the power of scrutinizing the religion of his subjects, and of punishing them for supposed religious delinquency, would be not only investing him with an unlimited degree of authority, liable to the most extravagant abuse, but openly surrendering, on our part, the independence of our reason, the decisions of our judgment, the dictates of our consciences, and the exercises of our souls.

The natural influence of truth upon the human mind, cannot be counteracted by suffering ; nor the operations of conscience be governed by methods of coercion. Torture, or even penalties of an inferior description, may make men hypocrites, but can never make them sincere believers of another's creed, nor force them to relinquish their own. By oppression, my assent to the proposition may be demanded, that the product of ten, multiplied by five, would be forty ; but my conviction,

that the true product amounts to fifty, must remain immutable in my own breast, though, in violation of truth, I might yield to the iron hand of him who requires the former. It is exactly thus in all matters of religion and conscience.

The theocratical government among the Jews is no longer interwoven and confounded with civil and political institutions. The kingdom of Jesus Christ is not of this world. He leaves to the rulers of the world the full enjoyment of their prerogatives, whatever may be their character, their religious profession, or their forms of government; and he leaves their subjects in full possession of their religion, their consciences, and their rights. He chooses for his subjects those who willingly, and, on conviction, submit to his sceptre. Those who refuse his persuasive instructions, he terrifies with future punishments; and has not commissioned any power on earth, to enlarge, by force, the boundaries of his kingdom. How much soever persons may differ on points of theology, or about forms of worship, he has given them one law, which admits of only one interpretation—"Love one another; and whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

If I demean myself as a peaceable and useful subject, what has the civil power to do with my religious belief, or my prayers to God? A wise ruler, like an affectionate parent towards his children, makes no cruel distinctions, but allows the utmost freedom to all, and only takes from them the power of abusing it, by keeping the temporal sword in his own hands. He may patronize one religious denomination, and annex to it certain immunities; but he will never obey the dictates of any party, nor make himself a slave to the pride or resentment of any sect, knowing that this would be equally dangerous to his throne, as it would be prejudicial to the church of Christ, and the interests of civil society. He will introduce useful customs, cultivate good manners, and recommend morality and religion to all. He will enforce the best laws for the maintenance of justice, order, and good government; and when these are faithfully and vigorously executed, subjection and harmony, peace and happiness, will invariably follow. He will find no need to interfere at all with the religious opinions of his subjects, or with the public worship which they present to the Almighty; which would be unspeakably mischievous, by promoting ig-

norance, superstition, and error : noxious weeds which always flourish in the silent, gloomy shade of implicit faith and spiritual slavery.

A wise prince will apprehend no evil from the guarantee of unrestricted Christian freedom, but will find it incalculably beneficial to truth, knowledge, religion, and civil government. Let him refrain from all imposition and molestation in religion, and all the discord and contentions about opinions will presently sicken and die. Frequenting the same communion, and repeating or subscribing the same creed, cannot unite his majesty's subjects ; nor, on the contrary, can any difference in Christian doctrine or worship in the least alienate them on any point of national importance. Our happy country never flourished so much at any former period, as since the government ceased in a great measure to interfere with religion. In every age our national improvement has kept the most exact pace with the enlargement and security of our religious freedom ; and Britain will not arrive at the zenith of her prosperity and glory, till unbiased and universal religious liberty shall be permanently guaranteed to all her worthy subjects.

Religious dissensions cannot continue long, except among those who are instigated by interest or revenge : when all the motives to contention are taken away except those of truth and usefulness, controversy will not be virulent, or of long duration. If the magistrate do not throw out any bone of contention, but take care that all parties shall be equally safe, and no injustice shall befall any on account of their faith, there will be nothing to inflame passion or exasperate revenge : animosity will die of itself, when it has only novelty and the desire of victory to feed upon. The hierarchy would not have been overthrown under Charles I., nor would it have been necessary to have shed one drop of Christian blood, had there been no object of contest besides the real merits of episcopacy and presbyterianism.

For any one Christian to talk of controlling another where he has no authority, and can suffer no injury, in matters about which God alone can take cognizance, is the height of arrogance and presumption. This would betray the greatest possible want of charity. If a church possess all the marks of a true and orthodox church, except that of charity, the want of

this will assuredly disgrace them all. It matters very little what ecclesiastical enactments prevail, if the right of private judgment, which is essential to the Christian's faith, be taken away. Princes may conclude themselves safe in the affections of their people, when all religious restraints and impositions are abolished; and having tried the honourable experiment, they will never repent adopting principles so generous, and so congenial to Christianity. They cannot act otherwise, if they follow the rules and maxims of the Gospel, and wish to preserve any semblance to the spirit and character of its Author.

We tax not the state with unkindness; we hold in the highest esteem the candour and liberality of our civil rulers; but the cause we plead, without being dictated by any political views, is the result of deep conviction of its rights and deserts, as founded on the principles of reason, humanity, conscience, policy, and Christianity. Indeed, after mature and unbiased consideration, no man can disapprove of it, who is a real and consistent friend of divine revelation; for it is, properly speaking, only a proposal for the permanent and unrestricted spread of the Gospel, unconnected with all human commentaries and prescriptions. The discovery of truth, and the culture of unadulterated Christianity, ought to be esteemed as objects of the first importance among all private Christians; and whatever clashes with them, ought to be considered as an abuse of no ordinary kind. Are not Christian states, therefore, under indispensable obligation, in justice to their subjects, and from their responsibility to God, to view Christianity in the same light, and treat it in the same manner, as their Christian subjects? If this be granted, all is granted.

In America, in the absence of every species of religious domination and control, diversities of opinions prevail without confusion, and the worshippers of one God can harmoniously join their different forms without rancour or discord. Free and happy abodes! may no exclusive penal edicts disturb her repose! may no bold usurper invade her rights! may no favourite form of religion interrupt that equal freedom which gives her inestimable advantages! And why may not Britain, under her mild and happy constitution, exercise this Christian moderation, share this undisturbed repose, and appreciate these invaluable benefits? Shall New England recognise and gua-

rantee to all her children the blessing of complete religious emancipation, and shall Old England degrade her children by a continued embargo on the exercise of their rational faculties, and on the worship of God?

When this perfect religious freedom shall be permanently recognised by the statutes of the realm, and acted upon in all cases by the executive government, all classes of society will be easy, secure, and happy, being freed from all apprehensions of suffering one from another on the score of different religious opinions. This is the happy state of things which the friends of religious liberty wish to see realized by every free-born Englishman. Then will no one suffer hardship for the sake of his religion. A man's religion will then be no state crime. No one will be distressed in name, body or estate, or be deprived of any part of his birthright for his religion; but all good subjects will enjoy equal and impartial favour. As protestantism supposes, and Christianity requires all this; so the policy of the best governments in the world will tenaciously act upon it, as their greatest ornament, strength, and security. When this shall become the law and maxim of states, it will unite their subjects at home, give them weight and importance abroad, will sooth the sorrows, and heal the wounds of all classes of Christians: in addition to this, when all denominations shall cultivate and exercise Christian liberality and forbearance, the differences in matters of religion, which formerly through oppression shook the very foundations of society, will neither disturb the minds of the people, nor interrupt the peace of the community. Every man will sit under his own vine and fig-tree, with unspeakable satisfaction and delight. Every man, so to speak, will seek the road to heaven in his own way, without the least interruption from his brethren; and those who appear to err, will be pitied and instructed, not hated and punished: they will excite charity and persuasion, not coercion and persecution.

The civil power is bounded and confined to the care of the commonwealth, and not to be extended to the worship of God, and the salvation of souls; except by affording equal liberty and protection to all worthy subjects, with friendly advice and encouragement in their religious profession. To authorize the magistrate to punish without any state crime, those who

differ from him merely on points of theology, but are in all other respects good subjects, is in effect to give the magistrate a power to oppose the Almighty, to usurp the prerogative of God, to root out and destroy Christianity, whenever he may be so disposed.

God has not given any such power to the magistrate, and the people are unable to invest him with it. They cannot invest him with the power of choosing their religion for them, of worshipping God for them, of taking care of their souls for them. Or if they could make him their delegate and trustee in all these affairs, is he likely to be more attentive to the momentous concerns of their souls, than they are themselves? Is it not equally marvellous as it is absurd, that any people should ever have attempted to invest the magistrate with power in those things which do not at all concern the state, but belong to God and souls alone? This is the power of choosing and prescribing a religion for the people. No man, however, can so far abandon the worship of God, and the care of his own salvation, as blindly to leave it to the choice of another what doctrines he shall believe, and what worship he shall offer to God; and no one can be saved by conforming his faith and worship to the prescriptions of man.

It may be asked, Is the state then to be without religion?—This will by no means follow. On the principles now laid down, the governors of the state, as well as the subjects, have equal inducements to embrace the religion of their own unbiassed choice; and, seeing they are equally accountable to God as the common people, they are under equal obligations to embrace that religion which God proffers to their acceptance.—Ought not the king and the government, then, to choose a religion for the people?—It may be replied, that since no individual can owe any *religious* duty to the king or the government, it is unjust and absurd to require any. The state owes to every subject impartial justice; but impartial justice is openly infringed when any one form of religion is so upheld by penal statutes, that others are persecuted, or only licensed, or their members suffer privations, temporal or spiritual, on the score of their religion. The religion of the majority can have no better claim to the favour of the state, than that of the minority; nor can they, simply because they are the majority,

acquire a right to legislate on the subject of religion for the minority, or even for themselves; but are bound to receive, without alteration, the religion which God has provided for them, and requires of them.

On all questions of purely *civil* polity, the majority or rather the government are to legislate: but it is not so in matters of *religion*. Here, God is the only Legislator—the only Judge. On questions pertaining to religion, we owe no subjection to civil rulers, by constituting a part of that civil society over which they preside. Religion is not a legitimate subject of human and secular legislation. States can, with propriety and justice, consider men only as members of a social compact, formed for the temporal advantage of all parties; but to legislate upon religious subjects is beyond their cognizance, and belongs exclusively to the province and prerogative of Deity. In matters of religion, the magistrate enjoys no spiritual abilities or advantages which the Deity has denied to the people, and he has received no authority from God to interfere with their immortal interests. His high office is wholly of another complexion; and, as the father of his people, he will administer impartial justice, and this will direct him to equalize the religious privileges of all his subjects.

These views of human legislation, and of human rights, are daily receiving fresh accessions of light and encouragement in our beloved country. “The rights of conscience and of private judgment,” says a learned and pious clergyman, “are clearly established by this precept, ‘Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind;’ and ought by every description of persons to be held sacred, and treated with all possible tenderness. Christ is the only Lord of conscience, and only Lord of faith. ‘The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king:’ and over the consciences of his people there is neither judge, nor lawgiver, nor king besides. This is the great fundamental principle of protestantism.”*

It will be universally acknowledged, that laws are of no force without penalties; and temporal penalties in all cases of religion are absolutely inapplicable and impertinent; because no human being can know when the supposed delinquent deserves

them, while such penalties are utterly unavailable to enlighten and convince the mind. Without the conviction of the mind, the profession of religion is hypocrisy, while mere outward worship is displeasing to God; and that is unworthy of the name of religion, which constrains men to dissemble before God and men, for the salvation of their souls!

These methods, so far from promoting Christianity, invariably prejudice men against that power which allows them, much more that enjoins them, in order to make men religious. But when men are brought by force to outward conformity against their consciences, does it not overthrow conscience, and loosen the principles of integrity, the best security of good order and civil government? Does not this harden men's hearts, and encourage prevarication? What will hinder men from dissembling and cheating on the exchange, or with their customers, who are taught, to do it with God? And why may not men take this course with the magistrate, as well as with God and their consciences? The forcible imposition of religious faith and worship upon the souls of the people, therefore, tends directly to the overthrow of integrity, the derangement of the good order of society, and the subversion of civil government.

The restraint of religious liberty is the worst kind of sacrilege. So far as this restraint is brought into operation, it robs God of the honour which is justly due to him, and attempts to deprive the souls of men of their peace here, and their reward hereafter. It is that sacrilege, in comparison of which the robbing of churches is only as the rent in a man's coat, to a wound in his flesh. In addition to the absurdity of placing ignorance and knowledge on a level, it imperiously requires men of grace and learning to submit to its oppressive sceptre, binding them as in chains of iron, contrary to grace, conscience, Scripture, and common sense. When it is recollected that all these depredations are committed in open violation of divine authority, which expressly commands—"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them," what can be more odious or diabolical? This spiritual sacrilege is the greatest of all crimes. It is a sin against God and nature; against reason and revelation; against common sense and the principles of humanity; against the consciences of Christians, and the prerogative of God.

Religious liberty is one of the greatest blessings of life, without which life itself is a burden rather than a happiness. For what is every other enjoyment when this is taken away? If men are prohibited the exercise of their mental capacities, deprived of the natural rights of their souls, and controlled in their intercourse with God, what are they superior to the brutes, or better than mere machines? They might with equal consistency be forcibly deprived of their reason, their estates, their lives, as be restrained in the exercise of their thoughts, their religion, and the worship of God.

Let it not be supposed, however, that it is immaterial how men shall exercise those religious rights which God has given them. To Him alone are all men responsible for the use or abuse of their capacities and opportunities in things sacred; they are to be left to the enjoyment of their opinions, and to the employment of their faculties, without the least human infringement, whether the exercise of them respect a day or a ceremony, a doctrine or a duty. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth." It comes no more within the prerogative of state governments to fetter our capacities and exercises in religion, than to alter divine revelation, destroy the lives of their subjects, or fix their eternal destinies.

If we believe those who assume the power of ascertaining and fixing the public faith and worship, the common people are *incapable* of exercising the right of private judgment, consequently they can have no just claim to it; and it is absolutely necessary that the choice of religion be vested in more competent hands. "It would be rashness and presumption for the bulk of the people, say they, to settle their religious principles and practice, and it would be destructive of order and uniformity, would introduce extravagant opinions and sects, and be of fatal consequence to the peace of society!"—These are the specious pleas by which the invaders of the rights of conscience, in every age, and of every name, have endeavoured to soften their imperious claims, and to colour their unrighteous deeds. This, it should be recollected, is the basis of popery, upon which, among all the schemes that policy and ambition have projected, the sovereign pontiff has raised a correspondent superstructure. All pretensions to authority over

the faith and religious worship of Christians, by persons who acknowledge their own fallibility, have something in them so unnatural and despotic, that, unless the people are perfectly stupid and void of reason, they must sink beneath the weight of their own monstrous arrogance and absurdity.

These fanatical notions are directly calculated to exalt the grandeur, extend the dominion, and enlarge the revenues of the priesthood ; to pamper idle and luxurious persons with that which should have been the widow's support, or the orphan's patrimony ; to enable them to enslave the consciences of the stupified laity, and prostitute them to the vilest purposes ; they are, at the same time, open insults on the wisdom and goodness of God, by rendering the authority of his holy Word insignificant and contemptible. This representation, whatever favourable impression it may make on pious and ingenuous minds, will be despised by those who have tasted the sweets of power, and felt the enchanting benefits of leading the people blindfold ; it will be deemed of little weight when placed in the balance against ambition and interest ; while arguments drawn from their own principles may have incomparably greater influence.

On the grounds now stated, these persons opposed the reformation ; they opposed the toleration ; they opposed the comprehension ; they opposed king William in all his generous attempts for the extension of religious liberty ; they have opposed every subsequent act to ease the burdens and relieve the conscientious scruples of the people. It is manifest that this powerful opposition could not have existed, if they had not been actuated by motives exceedingly diverse from the spirit and principles of Christianity, and aimed at the attainment of objects and ends widely different from those which are sanctioned by the Gospel. To this general statement, however, there have been, and still are, among the venerable clergy, many worthy and honourable exceptions ; who most fervently wish for a purer reformation, additional religious freedom, and the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom.

If the authority of the church on the largest scale were granted, what would be the consequence ? What signal advantages would result from it to the church of God ? Would it render Christians more secure from error, than by allowing

them the unrestricted and impartial exercise of their own judgments? This will no doubt be questioned. Whoever will be at the trouble of looking into the history of the church, will find that the ecclesiastical guardians have generally been guided by a distinct interest of their own, and most frequently contrary to that of the nation and of the church of Christ. Instead of taking the lead in asserting the rights and promoting the liberties of Christians, they have been instrumental in nearly all attempts to destroy these invaluable privileges; and instead of propagating generous notions of freedom to the widest possible extent, they have generally instilled into the minds of the people slavish maxims, and inculcated abject submission.

It is a fact acknowledged and deplored by all true protestants, that the power of human legislation having usurped the prerogative of Deity, and claimed the superintendence of religion, brought the greatest of all evils upon the church of Christ; and that those evils continued to increase, deceiving and destroying the souls of the people, for upwards of a thousand years. Shall we then imitate the worst part of the conduct of our ancestors? By a passive and implicit subjection of our souls to the force of human legislation, we should be again exposed to endless artifice and collusion; but following carefully the authority of the holy Scriptures, and our personal convictions, we shall be lead into all truth and righteousness. If protestants presume to set up human authority against the right of private judgment, they sacrifice their first principles, attempt to destroy the foundation of Christianity, and to erect on its ruins antichristian delusion.

The foregoing arguments and representations may perhaps excite that fear, which has been incessantly proclaimed in certain periodical and other publications. Ecclesiastical persons are continually sounding alarm, and calling upon the legislature to interfere. And what must they do? Must they suppress the spreading of the doctrines of dissenters, and destroy their present liberties? It ought first to be inquired, what evil have they done? Have they broken the bonds of society? Have they increased the profligacy of the nation? Are those who have embraced the principles of religious liberty, worse members of civil society? Are they less attentive to their nu-

merous relative duties? Are they worse subjects, and less attached to his majesty and the civil constitution, than their accusers? Let those who charge them with these evils be prepared to prove their allegations; but if not, let them “not bear false witness against their neighbour.”

The patrons of religious liberty desire only to obtain unmo-
lested freedom for themselves and their countrymen, to believe those doctrines of revelation, and offer that worship to God, which to themselves appear most agreeable to Scripture. Ignorant persons, indeed, suppose that there is some alarming danger, lest the government should so far extend its liberality, as to restore the dissenters to the common privileges of their countrymen. Does the safety of the church, then, rest on the civil and religious privations of any class of the community? Is it also necessary that those privations and incapacities should remain, though a disgrace to our country, as a shield of protection to the church?

It will be asked, what will become of our church, liturgy, ceremonies, and ecclesiastical revenues, if all men should be rendered equally capable of public places under government? The church would, in this case, be placed in exactly the same situation as that in which it was placed by Jesus Christ, its only head and lawgiver. This exclusion is a modern expedient for the security of the church, with which the best of our forefathers were totally unacquainted. Were all persons restored to their natural rights and privileges, considerable accessions would be made to the strength of the nation, without endangering in the least degree the religion of the country: they would be enabled to serve their king and their country to the greatest possible advantage, in conjunction with all other subjects; and should they be so infatuated as to abuse their little power and influence, to the disturbance of the public tranquillity, they would show themselves worse than madmen, and of course be punished for it.

We ought to remember, that the unnatural connexion subsisting between church and state has totally failed to answer those ends for which it was originally intended; and that neither the interests of religion, nor the ends of good government, are at all benefited by the impolitic association. When the legislative body shall be convinced of this, and resolved to

make alterations in the state of the episcopal church, we presume not to conjecture what constitutional modifications they will be disposed to adopt. They will of course make no inroads on the purity of the episcopal succession; they will not affect the moral claims of the church; they will only divest it of power and authority in things sacred, and place every man in circumstances equally advantageous for his spiritual edification and future salvation.

Time, that great and bloodless revolutionist, has effected, through the medium of opinion, beneficial changes as unexpected as this would be. There was a time when legislators thought that penal laws, of the most atrocious kind, were the best means of propagating the faith, and of promoting the interests of Christianity. These laws, through the diffusion of knowledge and better principles, have become obsolete. There was a time when the high commission and the star-chamber, were accounted the most advantageous courts of judicature, both by the prince and the prelates. But these have passed away. There was a time when it was deemed useless and unsafe for the children of the poor to learn to read. But those days are gone. There was a time when only the learned were allowed to read the Bible, and to which they had access only in the original languages. But those days have passed away, we hope, to return no more. The patrons of religious liberty, placed in these propitious circumstances, may be allowed to agitate and announce their principles; and yet not be enemies to their country, traitors to the state, hostile to society, or opposed to the best interests of mankind.

Severity is always prejudicial to the propagation of Christianity. Sound reason and affectionate persuasion will sometimes prevail, but compulsion never will, to make men abandon their conscientious scruples. That violence which is committed on what men have been accustomed to esteem *religion*, awakens their abhorrence of such violence, and turns their veneration into frenzy. Whoever attempts to fill the house of God by compelling men to come in by force, will find it the sure way to empty it. This method, instead of driving any members in, will drive many out. They who endeavour to force men's consciences, in matters not injurious to the civil government, have no right notions either of civil government or of religion.

The suppression of conscience imports the suppression of religion; and the conscience that would injure another, is undoubtedly an evil conscience.

To refuse unrestricted liberty in matters of faith and worship, is destructive of sincerity and truth. The flame of opposition and persecution often kindles the flame of defence and resistance in the persecuted. They who erect their church on the ruins of humanity, and carry their spiritual conquest over slaughtered consciences, are not only ignorant of divine truth and human nature, but strangers to religion, and rebellious against the Majesty of heaven, whom they profess to serve; yet it is in fact, the majesty of the priesthood or a party which they adore and worship. Ceremonies are insignificant as well as indifferent things; but they make them *essential* who raise contention and persecution to enforce or defend them. Those ceremonies and encroachments which are set up to pull down liberty, may be warrantably rejected and opposed. Where liberty is destroyed, sincerity is destroyed: humanity and impartial justice are not to be expected in such a state. External modes and ceremonies please men of superficial minds; yet they are of no avail whatever in the sight of God. “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in *spirit* and in *truth*: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” Liberty of conscience to worship God according to his word, is the divine, as well as the natural right of every subject. This unmolested liberty is no way prejudicial to the government, nor hurtful to any individual in society, but conduces much to the honour of God, the welfare of the nation, and the benefit of the worshipper.

No truth can be more obvious, than that no man or body of men can judge for another in matters of religion, and that religion must necessarily be the result and determination of every man's own judgment: hence it unavoidably follows, that religion cannot be subject to human legislation, only so far as to afford it secure protection. It cannot be enforced by the visible sanctions of rewards and punishments. All that human legislation can with justice do, is to afford the doctrines of religion and the worship of God unreserved protection; but it can have no power, no influence on men's religious opinions or practice. All matters of religion and conscience are the un-

alienable property of those who hold them, for the use or abuse of which they are accountable to God alone. The magistrate has power to preserve the public peace, and to punish all public animosity ; but the soul of man is subject to a higher tribunal. The authority of the magistrate can, with justice, punish none but open criminals against the state. A man's religion, however erroneous, is no state crime. For his religion he is not accountable to the state, but only to the Supreme Judge of all mankind. Hence it will unavoidably follow, that all enactments in religion by the force of human legislation, whether popish or protestant, episcopal or presbyterian, methodistical or congregational, are not only unjust and oppressive usurpations over the rights of conscience, but direct invasions of the righteous prerogative of God, the only legislator in matters of faith and conscience.

God has not appointed any infallible guide on earth, to whom we are commanded to resort to know his will, and to obey his instructions. That which is taught by learned and good men, although in general it may be true ; yet, as it may be false, it cannot by any human authority be imposed upon us ; nor can we be obliged to receive it. Whether, therefore, the matter imposed be true or false, the imposition of it is equally an invasion of Christian liberty, a violation of the rule of Christian faith, and an assumption of the Divine prerogative.

The important and unavoidable conclusion from these principles, is, that no church on earth has power to enforce or establish religion by methods of coercion. All that men can do consists of instruction and admonition. Indeed, there is no power on earth, ecclesiastical or civil, that can confer religion on the whole nation, or even on individuals ; nor can such power benefit the cause of religion by officious restrictions or injunctions. All the aid which human governments, as such, can render to the propagation of religious truth, and to the observance of divine worship, is comprised in this, " Remove the obstructions." England's greatest glory, her unparalleled exertions in the cause of Christianity, have proceeded from the people, and have been the natural product of minds freely exercised, and of principles active in operation.

When we turn our eyes to the methods by which religion is promoted according to the *laws* of the established church, how

striking the contrast ! The weapons of this warfare are not spiritual, but carnal. In order to the establishment of religion, the means brought into active operation, according to the *laws* of the church, are creeds, common-prayers, and rubrics, articles, tests and subscriptions, canons and constitutions, oaths and temporal penalties, habits and ceremonies, excommunications and purgations, suspensions and deprivations, tithes and spiritual courts. These, with many other similar means, are employed to promote the established faith and worship. But such methods are absolutely inapplicable and unavailable to promote the faith of Jesus Christ, and obedience to the Christian code. These compulsory measures, whether in England or at Rome, are alike useless and inefficacious to establish the religion of the *Bible* : they can only establish the religion of the state.

All religious incorporations, invested with civil authority, and possessed of exclusive charters, are particularly prejudicial to the free operation of the Gospel, by offering a bounty to conformity, and denouncing penalties against nonconformity. The alliance, therefore, is foul and disgraceful to truth ; and its dissolution alone can place religion on a principle at all worthy of its true character, which is a direct appeal to every man's understanding and conscience. The church of England having assumed " a power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith ;" and having so decreed as to make human decisions the door of admittance to the ministerial function, the passport to Christian communion, and the tenure by which purely civil immunities are to be enjoyed, she has evidently forfeited the *principle* of protestantism :—" The Bible, the Bible *only*, is the religion of protestants." The spirit and principle of such an assumption is purely schismatical, and instead of promoting the religion of Jesus Christ, is the occasion of schism, bigotry, and persecution. There is *one Lord*, and duty to that one prohibits submission to every other in the great business of religion ; and all those churches, whether popish or protestant, episcopal or presbyterian, methodistical or congregational, which have superadded new laws and new penalties to those of Jesus Christ, have so far metamorphosed Christianity, violated the essential principle of protestantism, and erected a new system tending to the subversion of the Gospel.

No human power on earth can establish the faith and practice of Christianity. Every attempt of this kind requires man to pay his mental homage to the Deity, by the observance of some external ceremony. The ceremony, by encroachment and oppression, may be established: but the voluntary exercise of the soul in the performance, which is essential to the piety and acceptableness of the action, it is impossible for any created power to establish. If the religion of Jesus be considered as consisting of external rites and internal dispositions, the former, by the exercise of oppression, may be established: but, be it remembered, that the establishment of external rites not only fails to establish the internal dispositions, but the destruction of these dispositions is previously essential to the establishment of those rites.

No religion can be established without penal sanctions, and all penal sanctions in cases of religion are persecutions. Before a man can persecute, he must assume no inconsiderable share of arrogance, and renounce the generous dispositions of a Christian. No religion can be established without human creeds; and an enforced subscription to human creeds implies the existence of two dispositions contrary to true religion, and both expressly forbidden by its divine Author. These dispositions are, love of dominion over conscience in the imposer, and an abject preference of slavery in the subscriber. The first usurps the prerogative of Christ; the last swears allegiance to a pretender. The first domineers, and gives laws like a tyrant; the last truckles like a vassal. The first assumes a dominion incompatible with human frailty, and even denied to the angels; the last yields a low submission, inconsistent with his own dignity, and ruinous to that religion which he pretends by this means to support. Jesus Christ does not require; he does not allow; yea, he expressly forbids, both these dispositions; well knowing, that the allowance of these would be the suppression of the noblest dispositions of the human soul, and a degradation of revelation beneath the religion of nature. If human inventions have formerly secularized Christianity, and rendered such base dispositions unavoidable in times of ignorance, they ought now to be exploded, especially as all protestants explode them in *theory*. The Son of God did not come to redeem one part of mankind to serve the secular views, and

unworthy passions of the other : but he obtained freedom for both, “ That they may serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives.”

This view of the subject cannot, in justice, be deemed illiberal. We distinguish between the constitution of things, and many wise and good men, who yield submission to it. But if they be wise and good men under such inconveniences, they would be wiser and better men without them. Although we owe much respect to all men of worth, we owe more to incontrovertible, unchangeable truth.

The nature of faith and divine worship disallows all coercion. To say, “ our governors command it,” signifies nothing. If angels commanded it, they would require an impossibility, and demand that which they could not themselves perform. God has not appointed his creatures to enforce religious belief ; he has nominated no vicegerents to do this ; he has declared the attempt to be altogether vain. “ In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” The means which men employ to impose their creed on others, are all nefarious : they destroy a sinner to make a saint. The imposition of human creeds has produced so much mischief in the world, so many divisions among Christians, and so many execrable actions, attended with no advantage to religion, that the repetition of this crime would argue a soul infested with the grossest ignorance, or the most stubborn obstinacy. Dominion over conscience is that part of God’s empire of which he is the most jealous, and in which he will allow of no partner. The imposition of human creeds is the worst kind of fraud ; and before any man can accomplish it, he must perform two exploits : he must usurp the throne, and claim the slave. The attempt is irrational and unscriptural. The production of a belief of human creeds by penal sanctions is absolutely impracticable. The project never entered the mind of the professor of any science, except that of theology ; and, surely, it is high time for theologians to explode so awful a delusion.

Were Christians sincere in their professions of moderation, candour and affection, they would easily settle this preliminary of IMPOSITION ; and, this given up, there would be nothing else to dispute. It is the principle of imposition which is to be deprecated, as the occasion of the unhallowed feelings and

contentions amongst the various religious parties—the impious attempt of men prescribing to their fellow-men, what religious doctrines they shall believe, and in what way alone they shall present their united prayers and praises to the Deity! Our objections lie not against surplice, ceremonies, or service-book: but against every species of imposition. Let one party of Christians worship God as their consciences direct: but let no party forfeit any thing for doing the same. Theological war is the most futile and expensive contest; but theological peace, on these terms, is the cheapest and easiest acquisition in the world.

When the religion of Christ is established at all, it is established by more Christian methods; by kind persuasion and clear evidence, not derived from penal statutes, or the traditions of men, but from the conviction of divine truth wrought in the heart. This is the only secure basis on which all real religion rests. It needs not the arm of secular power and penal laws for its support and its prosperity; they can be of no avail—of no use whatsoever. Their officious interference by the addition of new laws and new penalties to promote the welfare of the Christian church, is not only an open impeachment of the wisdom and goodness of God, as if the government of the church of Christ stood in need of human legislation; but all such laws and penalties are so far from promoting the stability and prosperity of his church, that they always hinder the progress of true religion and the prosperity of undefiled Christianity. They are stumbling-blocks to religion; and, so far as they exist, they transfer religion from the authority of God, to the wisdom and policy of man.

It will be asked, whether *uniformity* of religion may not be required and enforced by legislative enactments?—Let it be remembered, that though it may be required and enforced by the heaviest temporal penalties, it cannot possibly *exist* among men, since their understandings, tempers, opinions, and practices are exceedingly diversified, and will, no doubt, so continue to the end of the world. All attempts to bring men to uniformity have been inefficacious, and can never prove otherwise. So long as men *dare* think, they will think *differently*. Among the numerous sons of the church, both clergy and laity, some maintain, and others reject, the doctrine of original

sin, as contained in her IXth article.—Some maintain, and others reject, the doctrine of man's spiritual impotency, as contained in the Xth.—Some maintain, and others reject, the doctrine of justification by faith, to the exclusion of human merit, as contained in the XIth.—Some maintain, and others reject, the doctrines of election and predestination, as contained in the XVIIth.—Some zealously defend the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, as the unequivocal doctrine of the church of England; while others with equal zeal reject it, as contrary to the doctrine of the Bible. Upon these and all the discordant points of theology, the bishops, the clergy, and the laity, are as far from uniformity as the east is from the west; and, after a trial of more than a century and a half, the church of England is still as remote from uniformity as it was the day on which the act of uniformity was first published. Calvin and Arminius, Socinus and Priestley, Swedenborg and Southcott, have found disciples and advocates among her officiating ministers; and, even in the stalls of her cathedrals, may be found as many theological varieties, as there were creatures clean and unclean in Noah's ark.

Though uniformity in religion be absolutely impracticable, and its desirableness extremely questionable, persons of very different opinions may unite, with mutual candour and forbearance, to promote the common interests of Christianity. It is evident from the most faithful historical records, that so far as uniformity has been attempted to be promoted by compulsive measures, Christianity has in the same proportion been defaced, and genuine religion has in like proportion been destroyed. Diversities among the various denominations of Christians, awaken and keep alive the spirit of free investigation, are peculiarly favourable to the detection of error, and the advancement of religious knowledge; while they afford a fine opportunity for the exercise of Christian charity and forbearance, the very possibility of which is excluded so far as human injunctions and slavish compliances exist.

It will, however, be allowed, that, by the decrees of popes, or by the acts of statesmen, something approaching to a uniformity of *profession* may be secured; but, surely, no man will call this *religion*, but merely a uniformity arising from a compliance with the political enactments of men. By the force of

human laws, men may be brought to subscribe to articles of faith, and to observe forms of worship, however diversified their real sentiments, especially when it is obviously connected with their worldly interest : but such uniformity has assuredly no connexion with religion ; it deserves not the name ; it is only civil or political obedience ; and if such persons do not believe the articles which they subscribe, and approve of the uniformity of worship which they practise, it certainly betrays something much worse.

There are certain learned divines who applaud “ those wholesome prejudices that bind the thoughtless to the religion of their country,”* and who degrade the dissenters from the established faith and worship, as schismatical and seditious. This has been the common stigma for ages and generations ; but had they recollected that the religion of their own communion was founded on the basis of human authority, and by human laws, they would have been compelled to ascribe the reproachful stigma to another class, and not to their dissenting brethren. The history of the church in all ages sufficiently proves, that the religious differences among men have generally related either to unnecessary ceremonies, or abstruse theories, imposed by human authority. That must be a poor religion, indeed, which rests on human laws for its very existence, and which requires the wholesome prejudices of thoughtless sinners, to bind their attachment to it.

This is a fanatical and dangerous notion of the peace and unity of the church ; which does not consist in the unity of profession, but the unity of affection and design. Every man ought to be borne with, not punished, nor stigmatized, for difference of opinion in religion : if he err, he is accountable to God only. There is not any thing that can secure the peace and unity of religion, but the allowance of mutual discussion, faith, and worship, together with the exercise of mutual forbearance. The other method promotes peace and unity only in *profession*, which is accomplished by promoting ignorance and prejudice, at the expense of Christian liberty. The remedy being a scandal to religion, is worse than the disease. It bears hard upon all honest men, who dare think and believe

for themselves, yet whose opinions and practice are discordant to the national creed : but it may be an advantage to the temporal interests of those who have more concern for the promotion and patrimony of the church, than for true religion and the salvation of souls.

The nature of religion, as matter of individual choice, and as personal property, necessarily supposes the injustice of all coercive establishments. There can be no establishments of religion without human force ; but the religion of Jesus cannot be promoted by such force : it addresses the conscience, and force cannot reach the conscience. The very nature of the religion of Jesus Christ, therefore, precludes the possibility of its union with the state.

If it be granted, that every man has an indubitable right to believe the doctrines of Scripture, and to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience, the illegality of all religious establishments by the force of human legislation must appear to every person of competent understanding, with all the glaring evidence of fact. For it is absolutely impossible that there can exist two contradictory rights, destroying each other : an uncontrollable right in every man to choose his own religion ; and an opposite right, on the part of government, destroying this right, and imposing their own faith and worship. The right of private judgment, and the right of establishing religion by human laws, cannot possibly exist together : they necessarily subvert and annihilate each other. We must, therefore, either relinquish in matters of religion, the right of using our understandings, our consciences, and our souls, and tamely surrender them to the dictation and government of those in power, which is an office they never can fulfil ; or claim uncontrollable liberty of conscience, as the undoubted birthright of every free-born subject, to the absolute exclusion of human coercion. Only grant to all subjects unmolested liberty to think, believe, and worship God for themselves, and we ask no more. This liberty we claim ; and this we as cheerfully grant to others.

We cannot wish to impose our religious doctrines and modes of worship ; and all we ask is, that all men may, in justice, be permitted to choose and act for themselves, following, without human restraint, the directions of holy Scripture and their own

consciences. We only claim for ourselves and our countrymen, unlicensed and unbiased liberty to make suitable improvement of our religious privileges, of which we must give a strict account in the day of final retribution. To deny this benefit would diminish our accountability to God, or force us to stand guilty before him at the last day. Thus it appears from incontrovertible evidence, that the establishment of religion by human laws, is not only incompatible with the nature of religion as matter of voluntary and individual choice, and as the personal property of every Christian, but is subversive of the dearest rights and strongest obligations of man's rational nature. This is one of the grounds and reasons of complete religious emancipation.

It has been affirmed, "that perfect liberty of conscience is a fundamental principle of the church of England."—This representation would certainly be correct, on supposition that in the church of England there was no other authority, or law-giver, besides Jesus Christ; but it is universally acknowledged to be otherwise, and that church expressly claims "the power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith." The secular magistrate is her supreme head, and acts of parliament are the laws on which the whole of her polity is founded—by which the whole of her government is directed. All the clergy in the land are bound to follow their instructions, and to obey their commandments: the civil authorities *alone* are competent to direct and coerce the highest officers of the church. All the members of the church are in exactly the same condition, so far as the obligation of the laws which bind the clergy are concerned. These laws proceeding from the highest civil authority, they neither can nor dare resist; nor must they presume to judge the ordinances of man, to which the whole of the clergy must at all times render prompt obedience. The most orthodox have no more liberty than the most heterodox: they must in the same manner bow their wills to the secular authority which prescribes their duty to God. They must all act upon this principle, and no other. It is at their peril to omit the observance of a single ceremony, or the reading of a single prayer, which is prescribed and appointed. They are not at liberty to preach the Gospel within the walls of any unconsecrated building. They have no right

of superintendence over the discipline which Jesus Christ has appointed to be maintained in every Christian community, but are compelled to submit to the officious interference of secular tribunals, under whose cognizance cases, to which spiritual discipline alone is appropriate and appointed by the authority of Christ, are visited with temporal punishment !

The clergy who render perfect obedience to the laws of the church, and thus refuse compliance with the appointments of Christ, offer resistance to the will of the Son of God, the only Legislator of Christians, and admit another lawgiver over the consciences of his people. What would they say for themselves, if they were charged with imposition on the conscience ? To mention only one instance, should the most holy and humble Christian offer himself to communicate at the altar, and scruple to *kneel* at the communion, would they not reject him ? How conscientious soever might be the scruples of the pious candidate, they would meet with no indulgence from them. They would not tolerate this weakness, though they knew it to be such ; but would insist on conformity. They would allow no plea on the ground of Christian forbearance. Kneeling at the Lord's table is a case to which the doctrine of Christian liberty expressly and signally applies : to compel the use of it is a gross outrage on that holy ordinance ; it is forcing and encroaching upon conscience, which Christ has left free. Notwithstanding the pretended plea of liberty, therefore, the church of England is built on human policy—on another foundation than that which God has laid in Zion. The sole legislation of Jesus Christ over the actions and consciences of his people *is not* its fundamental principle.

It ought to be recollected, as another reason of religious emancipation, that the actual establishment of religion is *beyond the power* of human laws. Religion is necessarily and absolutely independent of human power, and is a concern between God and souls alone. The power of human laws is totally inadequate to rule the thoughts of men, to preserve in them purity of Christian doctrine, to constrain them to “ worship God in spirit and in truth.” These and all other things, in which the whole of religion consists, are absolutely beyond the scrutiny and government of mortals. The exercises of faith and worship are the exercises of the soul, over which human au-

thority can have no rule—no cognizance whatever; and, since the control and government of souls belongs absolutely to God only, every attempt to govern them by statute laws or the decrees of men, is virtually an attempt to subvert the prerogative of God, or to wrest his authority out of his hands. That authority, which is always fallible and often sick of its own exertions, is absolutely unable to establish the religion of Jesus Christ in the hearts of the people. The national religion, therefore, which is required by human authority, and enforced by penal statutes, is not the religion of the *Bible*, but the religion of the *state*.

Human legislation may, indeed, establish the *form*, and force upon men the *profession* of religion. Men may be coerced to profess and subscribe any thing, whether they believe it or disbelieve it, especially when it is conducive to their secular interest; and thus be made conformists, and *hypocrites*: but such compulsive measures are too weak to convince the understanding, and rule the conscience. These rational faculties are absolutely exempt from all *human* jurisdiction, and subject to God alone. The great truths and amiable graces inculcated by the Gospel, having an immediate respect to the intellectual powers of man, are incapable of establishment by human legislation. As all the ruling powers on earth are absolutely unable to inspect and rule the heart; so are they equally unable to enforce those heavenly things which immediately and principally concern the heart. This outvies their most extended power, and is manifestly the sovereign and exclusive prerogative of God. The civil power may as soon force the subjects to become rich, or wise, or healthy, as force them to become *religious*.

Religion, if it exist at all, must be matter of choice—not of coercion. No human power on earth can heal the disorders of the mind—can rectify the tendencies of the will—can impart conviction to the conscience—can conquer the heart to the love of God, and faith in Jesus Christ. It is as impossible for human power to rescue a soul from sin, as it is to save a man from death. Penal sanctions cannot be brought to act upon the conscience; they have no controlling force upon the reason; they attest nothing—they prove nothing; therefore they avail nothing towards making men religious. Human power

may as well attempt to veil the sun in the sky, as to control religious sentiment ; or attempt to create a world, as to force religion upon mankind. Had men correct notions of religion, as matter of individual choice, and as that which equally concerns every soul of man, they would freely acknowledge, that it would be equally proper to talk of licensing the light of the sun, or the rain from the clouds, as to talk of licensing the profession of religion, and the worship of Almighty God. So that the expression, “ The establishment of *religion*” by the power of *human* legislation, is grossly absurd : it is a solecism in language, and very much calculated to deceive the people. The highest ruling powers on earth, whether in England, in France, or at Rome, are as unable to force their subjects to become religious, as they are to create a world ; and every attempt to do this is destructive of Christianity, and an intrusion upon the kingly office of Jesus Christ. The power and authority of earthly rulers is wholly civil ; and men are accountable to the great Searcher of hearts alone, in things pertaining to religion and the salvation of their souls. This is the complete religious emancipation which naturally belongs to every free-born subject.

The disavowal of human authority in religion fixes the support and progress of Christianity on its only proper foundation, by restoring it to its primitive standard. In the first and purest ages, the churches of Christ were total strangers to an alliance with temporal powers ; and so far were they from needing their aid, that Christianity never flourished so much as during the first three centuries, when those powers were combined against it. The protection after this period afforded by Constantine, though perhaps well intended, diminished its purity, more than it added to its splendour ; and by degrees Christianity becoming the tool of the empire, was founded on the wisdom and policy of men, and employed for secularity, aggrandisement, and oppression. The institution of Jesus Christ was metamorphosed into an engine of state.

The pretence of uniting Christianity with the civil government, is the assistance it affords in promoting the peace and good order of society. But incalculably greater benefit will be derived from it, without such incorporation. Religion, if it have any power, operates on the *conscience*. When it is re-

ceived and practised, it produces unshaken obedience to the civil constitution, and good-will to mankind. Resting solely on the belief of invisible realities, and having an eternity of bliss in prospect, it can derive no additional weight or solemnity from human sanctions; but will appear to the greatest advantage, and of the greatest force, when placed on hallowed ground, remote from the parade of human wisdom and worldly policy. Can it be imagined that those who reject all ecclesiastical enactments, and who receive their religion wholly from Divine revelation, do not feel much more powerful restraints, whether religious, moral, or political, than those who receive their religion from the hands of parliament? Human laws may debase Christianity; but they cannot improve it; and being unable to add any thing to its evidence, they can add nothing either to its excellency, or its force.

When Christianity is attempted to be established by the coercion of man, it is always requisite to give the preference to some particular system; and, as the magistrate is no better a judge of religion than others, he may sanction that religion which is false. Outward splendour and secularity have always been attached to national churches; which are strong inducements to their ministers to defend them, how remote soever from the truth. By this means error and corruption have become permanent, and the public creed which has happened to prevail, true or false, has continued in spite of superior light and improvement, to be handed down without alteration from age to age. Hence the disagreement between the public creed of the church, and the private sentiments of its ministers; an evil growing out of the very constitution of an hierarchy, and not likely to be amended before it brings the clerical character into the utmost disgrace. Hence also the rapid spread of infidelity, the natural consequence of the corrupt alliance of church and state.

Wherever we turn our eyes, we shall perceive the depression of religion to be in proportion to the elevation of the hierarchy. In France, where the establishment had formerly attained the utmost splendour, piety had utterly decayed; in England, where the hierarchy is less splendid, more remains of the latter; and in Scotland, whose national church is one of the poorest in the world, a greater sense of religion appears

among all ranks of people, than in either of the former. It must also be plain to every unbiased observer, that piety flourishes more among those denominations in our own country which are unconnected with the established church, than among the members of any ecclesiastical establishment in the world. This is the natural consequence of having their minds, devotions, and exertions unfettered with the traditions and impositions of men. The uncorrupted doctrines and worship revealed in the Gospel, exempt from burdensome forms, ceremonies, canons, oaths, creeds, and subscriptions, have free course among the people. Christianity, so to speak, has fair play ; and, on the ground of its unadorned and powerful attractions, recommends itself to every man's conscience. A spirit of free inquiry being excited, and every man claiming in a degree, the unmolested right of thinking and believing for himself, no reflecting mind can wonder that the results are so beneficial, and that true piety is so extensively promoted.

The cause of true religion cannot suffer by the equal protection of all religious parties : but it would materially suffer if the different sects were, by force, annihilated or diminished. It is in vain to dissemble the fact, that every hierarchy is injurious to religion in proportion to its splendour, its opulence, and its penal statutes ; and that national Christianity is not the Christianity of the Bible. The character of piety advances as we descend to those who maintain that the Gospel is a simple institution, unallied to worldly power, and that Christian churches are voluntary societies, which acknowledge no head besides Jesus Christ, and claim the right of choosing and supporting their own ministers.

The allowance of unrestricted religious freedom is the only effectual means of destroying party prejudice and every root of bitterness among Christians, and of promoting, on its only proper basis, " the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." Whilst it secures to every man the right of embracing the religion of his own choice, to the exclusion of outward restraint, it necessarily brings all ranks and denominations of Christians nearer together ; recognises all as one flock under one shepherd ; and prompts them to forbearance, unanimity, and co-operation in every good work. As every infringement on the rights of conscience interrupts the benefit of free inquiry, im-

pedes the progress of undefiled religion, and depresses and degrades the human intellect : so unmolested religious liberty presents an open field for exploring all the objects and avenues of revealed truth ; acknowledges that intellectual independence, in all the concerns of religion, with which God has invested every rational and accountable creature ; and allows full scope to all the powers and energies of man, not only of obtaining a saving knowledge of his Creator and of worshipping God according to his holy word, but of promoting, to the widest possible extent, the edification and salvation of his fellow-creatures.

The establishment of religion by the civil power has, on the contrary, invariably created a spirit of hostility against those who have not belonged to her communion. Every ecclesiastical establishment, being a secular institution, not only generates secularity and corruption, but cherishes in the breasts of its members that jealousy and domination over others, which awfully depreciates their character. This is its baneful influence, especially on the minds of those in high official situations. Though God “hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth;” yet these men, invested with splendid dignities and emoluments, and armed with civil power and penal sanctions, are under irresistible temptation to stand on too high a ground, to assume too lofty a tone, and to look down with disdain upon other Christians, as if they belonged to some inferior order of creatures. Prompted by considerations which they feel unable to overcome, they not only extol their own church as the “most pure and spiritual church in the world,” and are displeased with all who think otherwise ; but proclaim abroad the slight imperfections of other Christian societies, depreciating the learning, piety, and usefulness of their most distinguished members. These disingenuous facts are too glaringly manifest on the page of English history ; and, would to God, that the faithful historian could say, that these facts belonged exclusively to persons of former generations ; but, alas ! these unhallowed tempers will be created and nourished in their bosom, as the pernicious fruits of their secular establishment of religion, so long as that establishment shall remain unabolished.

The evils now enumerated are usually accompanied by a dread of reformation—an attachment to abuses—a fond admiration of the splendour, opulence, and power of the church.

While the religion of other Christians is burdened with a ponderous taxation, being forced by compulsory statutes and *church rates* to afford pecuniary support to that religious communion to which they do not belong, the ecclesiastical establishment is a political embargo on the propagation of undefiled Christianity among churchmen, by the corrupt system of patronage—by secularizing the clergy—by restricting the ministry of the Gospel to consecrated buildings—by fettering the public worship of God with burdensome human appendages—by presumptuously attempting to improve the simple and spiritual worship instituted by Jesus Christ, by the traditions of men. An establishment involves a direct interference with the promulgation of the Gospel, the instituted means of converting and of saving mankind, under the pretence of regulating or aiding its operation. By this interference, it restricts the freedom of ministers, corrupts their motives, fetters their exertions, circumscribes the sphere of their usefulness, and all this under the senseless plea of ecclesiastical order and civil utility ! A minister must needs have the warrant of Jesus Christ countersigned by the state, before he has the temerity to execute it ! and even then, he is forbidden to preach the Gospel in unconsecrated places, and to convert souls by uncanonical methods ! Will any one affirm that all this is agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ ?

Notwithstanding these obstructions and impediments to the progress of Christianity, all enlightened persons who understand the philosophy of the human mind, and practically recognise the doctrine and spirit of the Gospel, whether they are in the church or out of it, will consider it as an indispensable duty which they owe to God, to promote religion on the sole ground of its intrinsic excellence—its sacred obligations—its heavenly attractions. Let the church of Christ be metamorphosed by turning a Christian society into an established church, and it is no longer a voluntary assembly for the worship of God ; it is a powerful corporation, full of those sentiments and passions which usually distinguish those bodies. The alliance of Christianity with the civil power has filled the page of history with innumerable crimes shocking to humanity ; and the progress of religious emancipation, if left to itself, would have been calm and silent, is now, alas ! traced through rivers of blood.

Among the evils attending this unnatural alliance, it is not the least that it begets the erroneous notion that the interests of church and state have some kind of inseparable, though mysterious connexion ; so that those who scrupulously disapprove of the one, are represented as enemies to the other. Are our religious opinions, then, the test of our loyalty to our prince ? Do those opinions constitute the criterion of our patriotic attachment to the state ? The slander of this representation is equalled only by its absurdity. But our very language has been tinctured with this delusion ; hence the usual cry of “ church and king.” Let the interference of the civil power be withdrawn, and leave Christianity to work its own way by the force of its own amiable attractions, and its incalculable benefits will appear in the face of all the world. The bigotry and animosity of sects will gradually subside for want of materials to raise the flame ; nor will any man feel any more political jealousy against his neighbour for being of a different religion from himself, than for being of a different complexion. Since the practice of toleration has so much abated the violence of those baser passions and those sore oppressions, which, for more than a century after the commencement of the reformation, shook the government to its very base ; how incomparably greater will be the peaceful calm and unity of all parties, when complete religious emancipation shall be universally recognised, and the established sect, like every other sect, shall direct all its care to the spiritual and eternal interests of men ? As the Christian religion furnishes the surest basis of morality and good order ; so the unlicensed and unmolested diffusion of it ought, for these substantial reasons, to be promoted by all who are concerned for the cause of morality or religion—for the happiness of the people or the welfare of their country.

The existing alliance between church and state is, in a *political* view, extremely suspicious, and much better fitted to the genius of an arbitrary than a free government. To the former it may yield a powerful support ; to the latter it must be ever dangerous. The spiritual submission which it exacts is unfavourable to mental vigour, and prepares the way for a tame and servile acquiescence in the encroachments of civil authority. This exactly accords with almost innumerable *facts* detailed on the page of history.

The strength of states does not consist in oppressing, wounding, and dividing from the body, any one class of the community ; but in making all their subjects their attached and unshaken friends, by avoiding religious partialities, and by scrupulously guarding the constitution against ecclesiastical dominion. The full exercise of religious liberty by every worthy subject, without at all interfering with the civil constitution, or weakening any one bond of the social compact, will recognise, unite, and cherish all as the children of one common family. By the adoption of this measure, the bonds of society will be drawn much closer, and the affections of the people be more firmly secured to the enlightened principles of the government ; under whose fostering care all her worthy subjects will be equally free, equally favoured, and equally happy. But by the exclusive establishment of religion, conscientious Christians are punished without a crime, wounded, divided, persecuted, depressed, and, in the same proportion, the sinews and energies of the state are enfeebled ; consequently, as a matter of *political* economy, it is a measure extremely prejudicial to the honour of the state, the strength of the nation, and the stability of the government. “ I perceive no reason,” says the learned Paley, “ why men of different religious persuasions may not sit upon the same bench, deliberate in the same council, or fight in the same ranks, as well as men of various or opposite opinions upon any controverted topic of natural philosophy, history, or ethics.”*

No principles within the range of human investigation can be more obvious or more important, than those laid down in the foregoing pages ; yet the human mind is almost miraculously slow in learning the meaning of them, and in appreciating their various bearings on the conduct of man. Ages after ages have men been proceeding with comparatively small improvement, and suffering oppressions and miseries almost indescribable, all for want of faithfully adopting them. Centuries after centuries these principles remained undiscovered, hidden deep from human thought ; and when brought to light, they have been opposed and rejected by the sordid upholders of ancient institutions. When shall we see them acknowledged

* Paley's Philos. vol. ii. p. 339.

as the sources of human action, and the rules of human conduct ? Then shall we behold mankind in direct march towards virtue and happiness.

Were civil governors to confine their attention wholly to the legitimate objects and ends of civil legislation, by the guarantee of religious rights equally to all, allowing religion to take its own course, they would have very little occasion to complain of the disaffection of any class of their subjects, and none for the privation of religious privileges. But when statesmen advance beyond their province, and invade the sacred rights of conscience, disaffection is unavoidably generated ; dissent is the painful alternative into which scrupulous and independent minds are thrown, not voluntarily, but by an unequal distribution from the civil rulers. Unfettered religious freedom, it will be proper to add, may be enjoyed under any form of civil government, but especially under the mild constitution of our country. Our legislative authorities are daily learning to balance the various religious parties, and will one day, no doubt, abolish the present impolitic and unrighteous partiality towards professing Christians. Let all their proceedings rest on sound principles, which are the sure offspring of knowledge ; while the best security of the state is that attachment which flows from sound principle and the stimulus of conscience.

Ecclesiastical impositions tend to enfeeble and degrade the human intellect. The mind, when bound by human creeds, constitutions, subscriptions, impositions, and proscriptions, dares not employ its powerful energies on points of divinity, and thinks feebly on all other subjects. While it tamely yields to tyranny and oppression, on subjects of the highest possible importance, how can it be free to think upon any others ? Bound down by the fetters of councils and convocations, conferences and synods, and dreading the displeasure of ecclesiastical rulers, with their tremendous penal edicts, the native energies of the mind are depressed and discouraged upon all subjects of human investigation, whether they relate to the works of God or man.

On the contrary, when a great people claim deliverance from all oppression and restraints in religion, and exercise perfect liberty of faith and worship, they display no inconsiderable share of intellectual energy, and thus develope one of the

noblest characters of man. The same principle is equally manifest in the common concerns of life, and in the improvement of society. Our present national prosperity is, in a great degree, to be attributed to the free and bold exercise of religious liberty; and the patrons of Christian freedom have been the chief instruments of raising our country to its present high state of manufacturing, commercial, and political greatness. A point of so much importance, therefore, deserves the maturest consideration.

The English manufactures have been estimated at the annual value of sixty-six millions sterling, of which sum the woollen trade is stated to produce fifteen millions. This is the most ancient, as well as the most important of our manufactures. Till the middle of the sixteenth century, the goods manufactured in England were of a very coarse and indifferent quality, and were frequently exported to Flanders and Holland to be dyed and finished, after which they were resold to the original makers, and brought again to this country. England is indebted to the dreadful persecution of the protestants in the Netherlands, under the infamous duke of Alva, for a vast accession of intelligence and industry in conducting this important branch of her manufactory. Five thousand families fled from the Netherlands, mostly into England, who re-peopled our decayed towns, and transported into our island, that which has become one of our richest mines of wealth. These protestant refugees were the open friends of religious liberty; and having suffered the most barbarous cruelties for the testimony of a good conscience, they brought with them minds filled with energy and decision, while they felt a deep conviction of the necessity of industry to retrieve their dissipated fortunes; therefore, by the continued energy and industry of these persecuted exiles, the woollen manufactory was permanently established, and extensively improved in this country.

The silk manufactures unquestionably owe their progress and perfection in England, to the exertions of the French refugees, who fled from their country, on the revocation of the edict of Nantz, in the year 1685. England afforded an asylum and a home to no less than fifty thousand of these persecuted *presbyterian* protestants. The most numerous body formed an entire colony in Spitalfields, then an open unoccupied spot

in the immediate vicinity of London ; but they have since become mostly incorporated, by intermarriages, with those of the English, whose general views of Christian freedom accorded with their own. The city of Coventry, celebrated for its numerous and valuable silk manufactures, has been famed, from the earliest period of the reformation, for its avowed attachment to liberal principles. In Norwich, formerly very famous for its manufactures, most of the principal persons were once the patrons of religious liberality, as many of them are to this day. At Bridport, where the flax and hemp trade is carried on to an immense extent, its corporation and a great part of its population are persons of a similar description ; and in the city of Exeter they have always borne a considerable sway. The great worsted works at Warwick belong to persons of the same class. The principal carpet manufactures at Kidderminster, with many other large worsted concerns, are in the hands of persons friendly to religious melioration.

The cotton manufactures in Lancashire owe their original establishment, and no inconsiderable part of their progress, to the Flemish and English sufferers in the cause of religious freedom, in whose hands are still many of those most important works. The manufactories of cotton, silk, and worsted stockings in Nottingham, Derby, and Leicester were and still are chiefly conducted by men favourable to liberty of conscience. Many of the manufacturers of china and earthenware in Staffordshire have belonged and still belong to persons of the same class ; and so have most of the large iron works both in England and Wales.* To this detail of facts, we may add, that, in all the manufacturing towns and districts throughout the united kingdom, there is not only greater intellectual improvement, but much more of the spirit and practice of Christian liberality, than in any other parts of the empire.

These instructive occurrences evidently show, that as protestantism has always appeared decidedly more favourable to national industry and mental improvement, than the profession of the Roman catholic faith ; so that modification of protestantism which appreciates the largest share of Christian freedom, has always had an intimate connexion with the prosperity of our

* Worsley's Observations, p. 69—125.

manufactory and our country. Either the exercise of manufacturing industry tends to liberalize men's religious principles, or the liberality of their religious principles tends to make them industrious. When the mind unbends to the dictates of religious truth, and is free to submit to its instructions, it is forcibly urged in the research of every kind of knowledge ; and it becomes habitual to the mind, so circumstanced, to think freely, and to act independently, on all questions, whether political, commercial, or religious. The love of Christian freedom, and that manly independence which it generates, as well as the strength of mind formed by the conscientious endurance of oppression, with the influence of freedom on the intellectual powers and moral energies of man, all combine to impart that important stimulus to the mind, by which the most useful knowledge is obtained by free investigation ; and the mind becoming thus habitually exercised on one range of subjects is well fitted for exploring every other. This sufficiently accounts for that moral and intellectual superiority, which the patrons of religious freedom have always manifested over other classes of the community.

The friendly and close connexion between the love of freedom, and the prosperity of the arts and sciences, in which the advocates of liberty have had so conspicuous a share, is proved by the history of knowledge in all ages and in all countries. Under the restrictive measures and deadening principles of the Romish church, neither art nor industry ever flourished. Hence in Spain and Portugal, under the entire dominion of popery, the want of them so awfully prevails ; while the most important manufactures in France are chiefly in the hands of the protestants. The increase of our own commerce, which contributed to throw the balance of property in this country into the hands of the commons, and laid the foundation of the middle class, was the grand means of consolidating our present constitutional freedom. The situation of public affairs, and the dispositions of men, became, by this means, susceptible of a more regular plan of liberty. The tendency of commercial intercourse to liberalize the mind, and to enlarge the sphere of speculation and interest, is one substantial reason why the principles of religious freedom have always flourished most among the manufacturing and commercial branches of society,

among whom religious knowledge and zealous Christian piety have invariably prevailed in the same proportion.

This doctrine necessarily stamps a general and important character upon the people. In all public subscriptions, and public measures of benevolence, the patrons of religious liberty have always borne a conspicuous part; while many of those excellent institutions formed in London and other places, which are deemed the honour and glory of Britain, owe their birth and support almost exclusively to this branch of the community. Nothing has so decisive a tendency to promote the welfare of civil society at large, as the mind being unshackled from the imposition of human creeds, and left free to investigate all the branches of theological knowledge. The human intellect, placed in these propitious circumstances, will unavoidably direct its energies to other subjects of investigation, and will be found in the best state to appreciate, and adopt, whatever is excellent or useful to mankind.

The difficulties which the conscientious and liberal-minded have had to encounter, have afforded very considerable assistance in the investigation and discovery of religious truth, and have been the very means of giving publicity to many hidden truths of Christianity. Gentler measures might have lulled them asleep. Violence, bigotry, and persecution, have roused their mental powers, given them new vigour, and a more honourable, as well as a more conspicuous existence. Truth, says a learned writer, results from discussion and from controversy; is investigated by the labours and researches of private persons. Whatever, therefore, prohibits these, obstructs that industry, and that liberty, which it is the common interest of mankind to promote. In religion, as in other subjects, truth, if left to itself, will almost always obtain the ascendancy. If different religions be professed in the same country, the minds of men remaining unfettered and unawed by intimidations of law, that religion, which is founded in maxims of reason and credibility, will gradually gain over the others to it. He adds, “that confining the subjects to the religion of the state, is a *needless violation of natural liberty*, and an instance in which constraint is *always grievous*. Persecution produces no sincere conviction, nor any real change of opinion: on the contrary, it vitiates the public morals by driving men to pre-

varication, and commonly ends in a general though secret infidelity, by imposing, under the name of revealed religion, systems of doctrine which men cannot believe, and dare not examine : finally, it disgraces the character, and wounds the reputation, of Christianity itself, by making it the author of oppression, cruelty, and bloodshed.”*

The measure recommended in the foregoing pages cannot, with any degree of truth, be accused of intolerance. To knock the fetters from the innocent and harmless prisoner, to open the prison-doors, and to say to the prisoner, “ be thou free,” will not, surely, be called persecution. Christianity, when uncontrolled by human power, is not only innocent and harmless, but inconceivably beneficial to society, and to man’s immortal interests. Would it be accounted intolerance on the part of the legislature, to rescind its own penal laws in religion, to allow Christianity to take its own course and work its own way, to afford equal favour and protection to all peaceable Christians, to make all denominations of Christians equally happy, by making them equally free ? Would it betray intolerance on the part of the subjects to pray and petition the legislative body to guarantee this unrestricted and impartial freedom to every worthy member of the empire ? How can we then, without the grossest ignorance or injustice, be charged with this odious crime for only recommending it from the press ? Are we guilty of intolerance for recommending, on the grounds before stated, that every native Briton may securely enjoy his religion, his conscience, and his God, as he enjoys his life, his health, and his estate, without the permission or control of man ? Is it intolerance to promote, in the most peaceable and friendly manner, the annihilation of intolerance ? With equal truth and justice might Clarkson, Wilberforce and others have been charged with this atrocity, for promoting, by every means in their power, the annihilation of the odious slave trade.

The doctrine here stated is so far from aiding the cause of oppression, that it necessarily secures emancipation from all human imposition and coercion in religion ; and in proportion

* Paley’s Philos. vol. ii. p. 335—337.

as men promote its diffusive melioration, they promote the cause of humanity, the happiness of mankind, the diffusion of unadulterated Christianity. Instead of checking inquiry into the source of existing corruptions, which have degraded the profession of Christianity upwards of sixteen centuries, and instead of branding men as enemies, who only attempt to clear away the accumulated rubbish of popish and protestant ages from spotless Christianity, that it may appear in its own attractive beauty, all who love and pray for the coming of the Redeemer's kingdom, surely, will hail them as the greatest friends and benefactors of mankind. They allow the Son of God to sit upon his throne, without a *partner*, without a *rival*, as the only Lord of conscience. By thoroughly appreciating this doctrine, they release Christianity from the most intolerable burdens;—remove almost innumerable stumbling-blocks which interrupt its progress;—consider every man's religious obligation as that which belongs exclusively to God and his own conscience;—refer every man's religious character to the decision of that day, when "God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel."

Nor can the feelings and motives by which they are actuated be placed among the baser passions of the mind, nor yet be ranked among those considerations which reason and Scripture disapprove. On the contrary, while attempting to promote unlimited spiritual melioration, their minds, uncontaminated by bigotry, secularity and intolerance, are stimulated to exercise the most unbiased and diffusive benevolence, by aiding the happiness of society—seeking the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom—promoting, without limitation or restraint, the salvation of their fellow-creatures; for the truth of which they can appeal to God, the searcher of hearts.

Influenced by these amiable and dignified principles, they are very far from seeking to accumulate power, with a view to the subversion of the established church. They openly disclaim all such attempts as directly opposed to their principles and intentions. They consider the kingdom of Christ, "not of this world;" and are persuaded, that it ought not to be promoted by worldly influence or power; that no coercive measures are to be used for the promulgation of religious truth;

that every man has an equal right to judge for himself on all theological subjects ; that no one ought to be disturbed in the exercise of this right ; that no means, besides those of evidence and argument, are to be employed to promote the religion of Jesus Christ. These are their leading principles, which constitute the ground and essence of all their claims ; and so long as they adhere to these honourable sentiments, it is absolutely impossible that they should ever attempt to subvert by force, the religious establishment of their country. Their principles forbid them injuring the rights of others, and constrain them to leave to others, the unrestricted exercise of those rights which they claim for themselves. As honest and conscientious Christians, they wish undoubtedly to convince all parties, that no hierarchy devised by man, whether popish or protestant, episcopal, presbyterian, or methodistic, has any foundation in justice or Christianity : but so far are they from aiming at their subversion by the exercise of force, that if one push of their finger would overturn St. Paul's, or even demolish the Vatican, their principles will not allow them to lift up their hand to do it.

The violent overthrow of the hierarchy by the presbyterians, in the reign of Charles the First, cannot in the least invalidate this statement. That demolition was accomplished by the patrons of *one* ecclesiastical establishment, acting violently against *another* ; when the principles of *both* were equally opposed to those of religious freedom. During the confusions of the civil wars, nearly all parties supposed it lawful and even laudable to employ the sword of the civil magistrate in the defence and propagation of their faith ! Neither the principles of a general toleration, nor the rights and claims of conscience, were then properly understood : the solemn league and covenant was as flagrant a violation of the liberties of mankind, as the decrees of the council of Trent. While the advocates of religious liberty, therefore, love and venerate the present civil constitution and government of their country, and feel the firmest allegiance that can possibly exist ; they cheerfully commit their cause to the favour of divine Providence, the peaceful operation of time, and the gradual improvement of mankind. As knowledge further increases, and their cause obtains calm and

impartial investigation, they have no doubt, that existing prejudices will give way ; that the justice and safety of their claims will be acknowledged by all wise and disinterested persons ; that Britain, under whose fostering care the principles of freedom have been nourished and cultivated, will not be the last among the nations to wipe from her code, the opprobrium of penal laws in religion, and to let all her children repose in peace beneath the shelter of complete religious emancipation.

Due submission to the civil magistrate, Christianity will under every form assuredly enforce. This is a fundamental principle upon which all sects and parties are agreed. The present ecclesiastical establishment has no necessary connexion with the existence of kingly government in the state. George IV. is as much the king of Scotland, where *presbyterianism* is the established religion, as he is of England, where episcopacy is established ; and are not the Scots, both clergy and laity, as peaceable and loyal subjects as the English ? The former are generally supposed, in these qualifications, to surpass the latter.

The protestant dissenters have been often represented, by those who certainly ought to have known better, as seditiously conspiring against both church and state. All this is calumny and falsehood. It is sufficiently known, that they are unshaken in their attachment to the civil constitution ; and that no denomination of Christians can exceed, if equal them, in their loyalty to the family on the throne. Their allegiance is founded on principle, not bribed by emolument ; therefore, it is unsullied in practice. Those who infer their disloyalty from their *religious* principles, involve themselves in a labyrinth of error and delusion ; upon which it will be proper to recite the words of a late venerable prelate :

“ There appear to me,” says bishop Watson, “ but two reasons for excluding any honest men from eligibility to public office—want of capacity to serve, and want of attachment to the civil constitution of their country. That the dissenters want capacity will not be asserted ; that they want attachment to the civil constitution of the country, is asserted by many, but proved by none. On this point the whole question turns. A man may certainly wish for a change in the *ecclesiastical* establishment, without wishing for a change in the *civil* con-

stitution. An episcopalian, for instance, may wish to see bishops established in all Scotland, without wishing Scotland to become a republic ; and he may wish episcopacy to be established in all the American States, without wishing that monarchy may be established in any of them. The protection of life, liberty, and property is not inseparably connected with a particular form of church government. The blessings of civil society depend upon the proper execution of good laws, and upon the good morals of the people ; but no one will attempt to prove, that the laws and morals of the people may not be as good in Germany, Switzerland and Scotland, under a presbyterian, as in England or France, under an episcopal form of church government.* Such were the enlightened and liberal sentiments of the late bishop of Landaff.

To select and endow a *particular order* of ministers, therefore, to teach the duties of submission, is useless as a means of securing the peace of society, though well fitted to produce slavish subjection. Ministers being placed in this situation, and considering themselves as allies of the state, are under peculiar temptations on all occasions to strike in with the measures of those in power, and to extend the obligations to obedience beyond just and reasonable bounds ; whilst the contrary party are often not only deemed unfit for offices of public usefulness to their country, but represented as an illiterate race, as worthy of being placed in the back ground of society, and even as disloyal and seditious !

The erroneous and degrading distinctions now enumerated have been the constant occasions of jealousies and contentions ; and these baneful effects, which are extremely prejudicial to the welfare of society and the prosperity of religion, will undoubtedly continue, so long as one class of Christians is exalted, and others are degraded by the guardians of the public peace. That Christianity, however, is a simple institution, unallied to worldly power ; that a Christian church is a voluntary society, invested with the right of choosing its own officers, and acknowledging no head but Jesus Christ ; that ministers are brethren whose emolument ought to arise from the volun-

* Watson's Life.

tary contributions of the people whom they serve, are maxims drawn from so high an authority, that it may well be supposed that every established church is doomed to vanish before them.*

The patrons of religious liberty, though diversified in many other respects, agree in asserting the rights of conscience against all human authority. On this grand fundamental point they are all united; therefore their principles are not likely to disturb the peace of society. They claim that liberty only which they wish the whole human race to possess—that of deciding for themselves on every question where faith and conscience are concerned. It is for sufferance they plead, not establishment; protection, not splendour or persecution. They can have no disposition to impose their religion on others, whose distinguishing religious tenet is the disavowal of all human authority in things sacred.

Were religious societies formed on the principles and model before recommended, they would be more than faint images of that church, which the beloved disciple beheld “Coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; which had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” Christianity, reduced to its original principles, is more plain and simple than is commonly imagined, and is calculated for general utility. Divine Providence seems to have preserved ecclesiastical records, and commanded devouring time to respect them, in order that posterity may receive instruction from these valuable and silent monitors, and not want seasonable warnings to avoid the errors of former times.†

With these instructive monitors before their eyes, and on the liberal principles stated in the foregoing pages, the patrons of religious freedom affectionately and respectfully submit the important measure to the calm and unbiased consideration of those in high ecclesiastical offices, whether it is not a duty they owe to God and the church of Christ to take the lead, then be followed by all the inferior orders of the clergy, and approach the throne and the two houses of parliament, with their fervent prayers

* Hall's Apology, p. 89.

† Jortin's Remarks, Pref.

and petitions for the abolition of all the oppressive ecclesiastical enactments, and continue their applications until they prevail. Setting so worthy an example, they will no doubt be imitated by the people, and the cause will eventually prove triumphant. The legislative body, we may be confident, will not be deaf to their united cries; and a single act of parliament will not only annihilate all the existing penal edicts on the score of religion, but place all his majesty's subjects in the secure possession of their native religious rights—the rights of their souls—the gifts of God—even complete religious emancipation.

In the preceding history, the reader's attention was briefly directed to the munificent and successful co-operation of all religious parties, upon the renewal of the East India company's charter, by procuring unrestricted religious liberty for fifty millions of Pagan subjects under the British government in a foreign land, and for all British subjects who might be disposed to transport themselves to those distant climes, and reside among the natives, to promote their conversion to Christianity. In this grand national effort, the voice of a great people, composed promiscuously of all ranks and all denominations, was heard from upwards of nine hundred petitions presented to the two houses of parliament; and, to the unspeakable joy of all people, as well as the unexampled honour of the English legislative body, that voice was not heard in vain. On this memorable occasion, the bishops and clergy, with all classes of dissenters, openly and zealously pleaded the cause of religious liberty, so far as it related to the conversion and salvation of the idolatrous Hindoos. Why then should they be reluctant or afraid of employing similar zeal and co-operation to obtain equal freedom for themselves and their fellow Christians at home? Is the blessing of unrestricted religious liberty suited only to idolators in a foreign land? Is it a blessing particularly adapted to promote the improvement and happiness of the deluded Hindoos? And would this blessing prove ruinous to the improvement and happiness of Britons and Christians? Let all ranks and all parties in the united kingdom, therefore, laying aside their peculiar prejudices, take the subject into cool, impartial, and friendly consideration: then will they assuredly

employ similar efforts in behalf of themselves and their countrymen ; and, from the munificent liberality of the government and the legislature, on the former occasion, they may, without presumption, anticipate similar joyful success.

This proposed improvement of our national honour and happiness, will not in the least deprive the clergy of their zealous exertions for the diffusion of pure Christianity, or of any part of their work of faith and labour of love. The important measure will not diminish, but greatly enlarge the field of their assiduity and usefulness ; and by removing the multiplied stumbling-blocks out of the way, they will have unlimited scope for employing all their learning, talents, and piety, to promote the conversion and salvation of mankind. When, therefore, we consider the sacredness of their character, and the responsibility of their office, as the shepherds and overseers of the flock of Christ ; may we not naturally conclude, that their zeal and their influence will not be wanting in a cause of such vast magnitude, as that of restoring to all British subjects, clergy and laity, those sacred rights which were given them by their Creator, and of securing to them equal advantages of worshipping God and obtaining the salvation of their souls. They need only set the example in aiding and promoting this great national benefit, and they will, no doubt, be followed by the people, the parliament, and the monarch on the throne.

To this important measure no objection can arise from a careful solicitude for undefiled religion ; since this is the only scheme ever offered to man, of bringing unfettered Christianity into full play among mankind, and of employing all the generous exertions of Christians for the universal diffusion of the Gospel of Christ. The most zealous patrons of religious emancipation cannot with the least degree of justice, be accused of being enemies to true religion, or even to the religion of the established church. Religion, and the establishment of it, are two things absolutely separate and perfectly distinct. " A religious establishment," says archdeacon Paley, " is no part of Christianity," consequently no part of religion : " it is only the means of inculcating it."* To true religion, as adopted

* Paley's Philos. vol. ii. p. 303.

by the pious Reformers, as defended by the army of martyrs, as preached by the best of the clergy, as embodied in the doctrinal articles of the church, we feel the strongest possible attachment.

To prevent the possibility of alarm, it ought to be distinctly understood, that the measure now proposed for unbiased consideration, by no means implies the abolition of the *episcopal* church. The rights and claims of the episcopal church to the protection of the state, are equally just and powerful as those of any other church in the world. Yet the same legislative power that erected the *establishment* of episcopacy can with equal ease and equal justice take it down, and, at the same time, leave *episcopacy*, the use of the liturgy, and the forms of worship, with all that appertains to episcopal government, untouched; excepting so far as they infringe on the native rights of mankind. "The powers of parliament," says Sir Edward Coke, "are so transcendant, that they can make, enlarge, repeal, abrogate, and expound all law, civil and ecclesiastical; they can alter, new-model, or abolish the established religion of the country, as was done by Henry VIII. and his children, Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth." All ecclesiastical impositions may be rescinded without the least encroachment on the natural rights of any individual in the land, and the episcopal church be fixed on the original foundation of the church of God, which is that of a free and voluntary society. On the adoption of this salutary measure, every bishop and clergyman in the nation, as well as every other member of the church, would continue equally firm and zealous in his attachment to the present episcopal worship. The church being thus freed from all its burdensome oaths, subscriptions, privations, impositions and temporal denunciations, the bishops and clergy will find that they can never be sufficiently thankful; while the proposed measure will confer unexampled honour on the government, accompanied with incalculable benefits to the nation and the church of God. The remains of ignorance and intolerance of former times cannot grow just or venerable by their antiquity. These penal restrictions are deformed protuberances on the body of English law, a public disgrace to the statute-book, awfully scandalous to religion, and unspeakably injurious to the estab-

lished church. The repeal of penal statutes in religion will plant unfading laurels on the brow of royalty, reflect distinguished honour on the nobility, and secure equitable religious privileges to all worthy subjects. Their removal will give firmness, beauty, and glory to the British constitution; will render it more deservedly the admiration and envy of Europe; and constitute our Island the most favoured and happy among all the nations of the world.

This grand national improvement will fix the church on its primitive and only proper foundation. On the adoption of this most salutary measure, the church, renouncing every species of domination and intolerance, will necessarily confine her influence and operations within her only proper sphere—the advancement of the spiritual and eternal interests of mankind, to the exclusion of secularity and oppression. Every man of talents and piety will then stand on the same hallowed ground, and have equal prospects and encouragements for promoting the salvation of souls. Those “wholesome prejudices that bind the thoughtless to the religion of their country,” will indeed lose their influence; and the mysterious, but overwhelming charms of bigotry and superstition will, in a great degree, sink to rise no more. The principal bone of contention being removed, episcopal and other Christians will necessarily be brought to greater friendship and unity. Their respective terms of Christian communion being made much more equal than they were before; also the foundation and superstructure of their respective churches being brought much nearer the same primitive model, they will be ashamed of “the unfruitful works of darkness,” while holy emulation and zealous co-operation to promote the grand objects of Christianity, will constitute prominent features in the character of different parties. The beneficial consequences of such a state of things, as every one will easily perceive, will be universal peace within our borders, and unexampled prosperity in the church of God.

In stating the advantage of religious freedom, and pleading the cause of complete religious emancipation, we are not conscious of showing the least want of deference or esteem for persons in the higher ranks of society; but, should any persons be disposed to think otherwise, we hope they will impute it to

our superior regard for divine truth and Christian liberty. These are treasures too valuable to be relinquished, or any part of them to be surrendered, either to gain the smiles, or to avoid the frowns of mortals. Those who appreciate the value of religious liberty can never give up their important claims, or desist from prosecuting their just rights, till the state either place the whole of man's accountability in religion on the authority of God, and proclaim all her children free, or seal their lips in eternal silence. One of these alternatives must prevail; and till then, every son and daughter of Britain must witness their unwearied endeavours to promote that liberty wherewith nature and Christianity have made them free: they will temperately, but steadily pursue every measure which the happy constitution of their country allows to all her subjects, for the recovery and security of their native rights; and they will continue to make known those principles which they believe to be agreeable to reason and Scripture, without asking whether they enjoy the toleration or the frowns of man.

To sum up the whole in few words, they rest their claims on the following propositions, all of which they hold as inviolably sacred:—That the power of magistrates is limited; and that they have no authority to take cognizance of the religious opinions of their subjects, until they produce some criminal overt acts, evidently injurious to society:—that the power of judging what religious doctrines are to be tolerated, belongs to no human creature:—that the allowance of such power to any man or body of men, implies the allowance of a right to suppress and persecute the opposite doctrines:—that no church has a right, either from the state or from the Scriptures, to prescribe articles of faith to her members:—that the words of divine inspiration alone, are entitled to implicit submission:—that the religious tenets of the different parties, may be equally protected, without the least prejudice to the community:—that the Scriptures contain every thing necessary to salvation, and that the unlicensed belief and promulgation of what they contain, is the only proper security of true religion:—that a uniformity of Christian faith is equally impossible and unnecessary:—that the usurpation of a power over conscience is the grand characteristic of the church of Rome; and so far as any

other church retains this power, it retains the worst trait of antichrist, and imitates the worst part of popery.

It would, however, be deemed extreme presumption to conjecture how soon the happy period will arrive, when the legislative body will dissolve all religious tests, and rescind existing penal laws on the score of religion ; and when they will release the episcopal church from its present intolerable bondage, and permanently guarantee unmolested Christian freedom to every worthy member of the empire. They have accomplished objects of much greater magnitude, and in the face of opposition much more formidable. It may be expected that all persons who are influenced by secular considerations, whose worldly interest is interwoven with the establishment, will raise a violent opposition ; but their opposition against a measure merely because it does not comport with their secular advantage—a measure founded in liberality and humanity, in justice and Christianity, will be of no avail. All their opposition will be only as the spider's web. The rights of human nature are understood and appreciated. They are no longer asserted in corners, but openly made known to all. Man's accountability to his Maker in all matters of religion, and the immediate dependence of the human understanding and conscience on God alone, are doctrines now generally confessed. The distinction between the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdoms of the world, is, at least in *theory*, almost universally acknowledged.

Such is the alteration of men's principles, and the improved state of society, that it is deemed exceedingly preposterous, that our ancestors, just emerged from popish darkness, should dictate to us what we shall believe, and how we shall worship God !! Some of the most learned and conscientious of our bishops and clergy, who are the glory of the established church, find themselves cramped and fettered by the authoritative decisions of their forefathers, and long and sigh to be released from their present grievous bondage, that they may enjoy the glorious liberty of the sons of God. The liberty to think, and speak, and write on all points of theology, is in theory accounted the indubitable right of Christians—a right denied at the reformation. Being freed from the galling yoke of arbitrary power in the state, and from the intolerable burden of priestly

domination in the church, all ranks of society *may* suffer themselves to be instructed—*may* yield to the evidence of truth—*may* listen to the dictates of their consciences, without any one to make them afraid. The darkness and slavery of the middle ages have passed away. The centuries, which have elapsed since the reformation, have exhibited those scenes of intolerance, which demonstrate the noxious nature and fatal consequences of the baneful alliance. The same infinitely wise God, who called our ancestors to attack the papal *supremacy*, is now directing Christians to assert the *spirituality*, the *freedom*, the *independence* of the Redeemer's kingdom; to bear witness to His title to sway his own sceptre; and to endeavour, according to their respective stations, to settle the church on her own proper foundation. Placed in these propitious circumstances, will Great Britain neglect the favourable opportunity, and not even attempt to perfect the great work of reformation? This would betray a coolness in the cause of religion, only equalled by its own ingratitude. The present age seems to be particularly marked out by the providence of God as most proper for annihilating every relict of antichristian imposition and slavery. That work, which was ever reasonable, and always necessary, is now practicable and safe. "Our constitution," says the duke of Sussex, "is not made for great, general, and proscriptive exclusions; sooner or later it will and must destroy them, or they will destroy the constitution."*

All ranks and denominations of Christians renouncing their secularity and intolerance, restoring their churches to the apostolic purity and simplicity, regulating all things according to the spirit and prescriptions of the Gospel, and allowing Christianity to take its own course and work its own way—then will the important measure now proposed unavoidably follow. When the churches of Christ shall be placed in these propitious circumstances, Christianity, unclouded and unencumbered by human appendages, will again be suffered to breathe her native air, and all classes of Christians will enjoy equal protection, equal privileges, equal happiness, and prove themselves to be an unspeakable benefit to each other and to the nation.

* Speech on the Catholic Petition, 1812.

Those Christians, who imbibe the spirit of the New Testament, and on whose minds that blessed book is suffered to operate, are distinguished by a noble freedom from sectarian antipathies : without verging to the extreme of latitudinarian indifference, they can rejoice in the peace and prosperity of all parties. Every man is a friend and a brother who consecrates himself to the glory of the Saviour ; and every society a church in whose temple Jesus evidently records his name. No man can be free from bigotry who does not behold with delight the increase of the Redeemer's subjects, and the extension of his empire, although the glorious work should be promoted by Christians of other denominations : selfishness, under one or other of its modifications, may lead to a bigoted attachment to a particular sect ; but it is only the purely benevolent impulse of Christianity that can fix the heart with equal kindness upon all the compartments of the universal church.

The happy influence of this godlike philanthropy, by enlarging the mind, by opening an extensive range for the gratification of Christian sympathies, by the developement of Christian principles, and by assimilating our views and dispositions to the church triumphant in heaven, must powerfully recommend it. The catholic Christian knows and feels that the expansion of his intellect is friendly to the increase of piety. He possesses a principle which connects him with men of every colour, and of every clime. His love, his faith, his hope, his joy, are all on an infinitely larger scale than the same dispositions in the bosom of a sectarian bigot.

By this means, the pious soul is brought into a near approximation to the church triumphant. In proportion as Christians cherish this disposition, they may be said to feel the beams of the latter day glory, and to associate themselves with the spirits of just men made perfect, who, on looking down from their celestial thrones, perceive not the various barriers and enclosures which break Christians into different communions ; but are attracted equally to every spot where the symbols of the divine presence are displayed.*

Notwithstanding the foregoing important considerations, and

these encouraging signs of the times, there is still, among all denominations of Christians, great room for the exercise of additional sympathy and forbearance. We have reason to fear that there is more of the appearance of a catholic spirit, than of the reality. Multitudes are extremely liberal in their professions, and imagine themselves to be sincere, till they are brought to the test ; but no sooner does another sect happen to come in contact with them, or with their endeared objects or pursuits, than Christian liberality takes her flight, and a bigoted, party spirit shows its unseemly head. All classes have still much to learn, and have need to become scholars in the school of Christian charity. Habits and prejudices in old established states yield with great reluctance to the demands of reason, justice and Scripture. A wide field is open for universal improvement in the spirit and practice of religious melioration, particularly among the higher ranks of society. One of the most important advantages to be derived from Christian antiquities, says a celebrated writer, is to learn wisdom, union, and moderation, from the faults, indiscretions, and follies of our predecessors ; to observe carefully what was good, and what was blameable in remoter ages, and thence improve ourselves, by removing the blemishes and defects, and by adopting every thing commendable.*

Should all classes of Christians studiously avoid the evil and imitate the good conduct of their forefathers, imbibing the spirit, and following the example of those, “ of whom the world was not worthy,” then will be happily fulfilled the prophetic vision, when “ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together ; and a little child shall lead them. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain : for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

To the accomplishment of so glorious a prediction, let the fervent prayers and zealous exertions of Christians be united ;

* Jortin’s Remarks, Pref.

and above all, LET BROTHERLY LOVE CONTINUE ; that all the remains of jealousy, which often defeat the noblest objects, may be completely removed ; that holy zeal for the advancement of pure religion may moderate all inferior considerations ; and that THE WISDOM WHICH IS FROM ABOVE, which is FIRST PURE, THEN PEACEABLE, GENTLE, EASY TO BE ENTREATED, FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS, WITHOUT PARTIALITY, WITHOUT HYPOCRISY, AND THE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS SOWN IN PEACE OF THEM THAT MAKE PEACE, may increase and abound among all parties : that all MAY WITH ONE MIND AND ONE MOUTH GLORIFY GOD, EVEN THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

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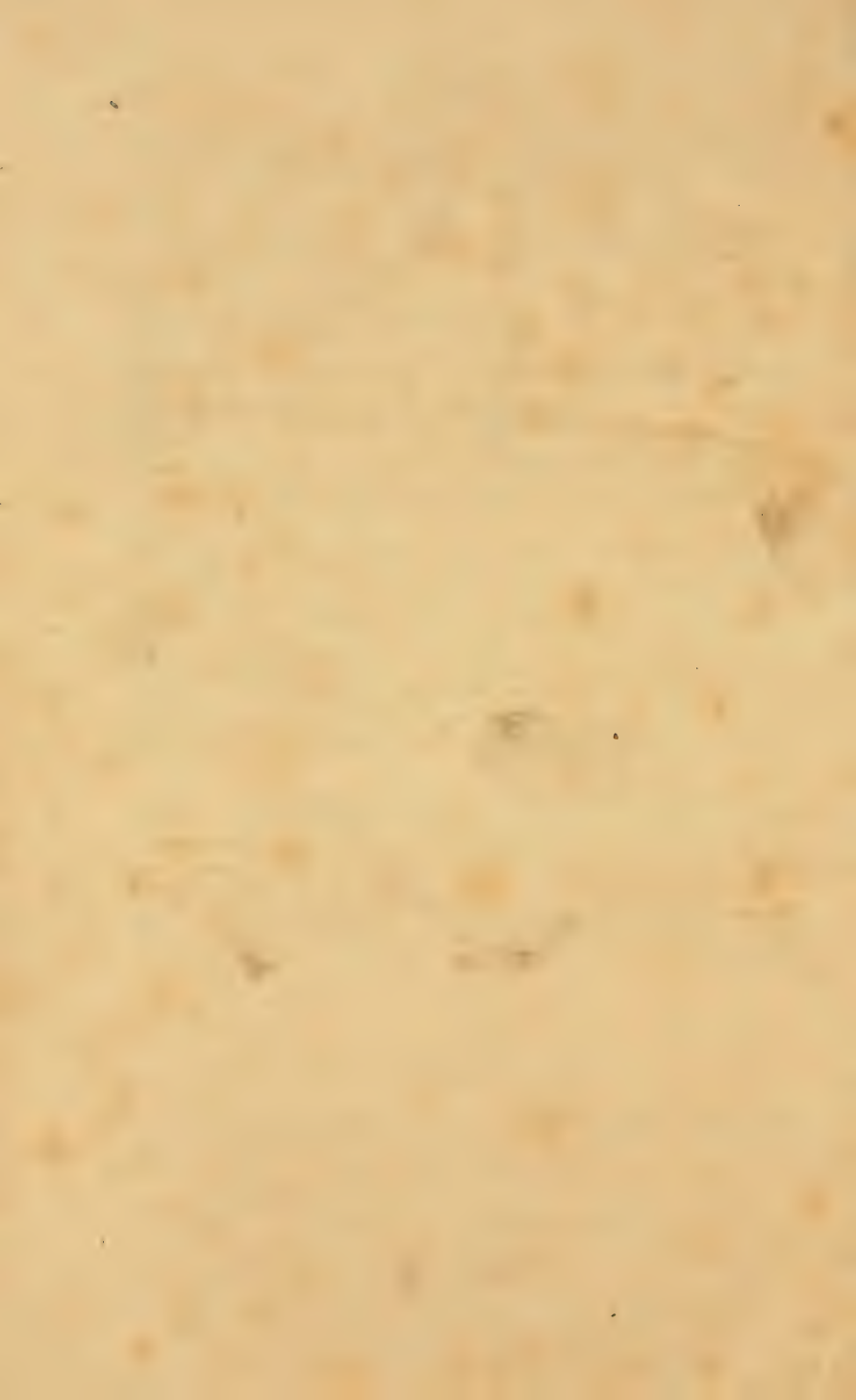
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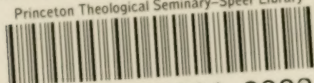






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